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THE NEXT INSTANT THEY PLUNGED INTO THE OUTER ABYSS, STILL GRAPPLING, SHORT-STOP MAJE UPPERMOST.

OR, OLD FALCON'S MASTER GAME.

The Story of a Great Sensation.

BY JACKSON KNOX,
(OLD HAWK.)

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"THE CIRCUS DETECTIVE," "THE HURRI-
CANE DETECTIVE," "CAPTAIN CLEW,"
"THE ROCKET DETECTIVE," "OLD
GRIP," "THE SALAMANDER DE-
TECTIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

AN OPENING GAME.

It had been a great day on the campus of the Medical College of Owensburg, a mountain county town in the interior of New York State. A return match game of base-ball between the college nine and the team of Winghampton, a flourishing manufacturing village a dozen miles away, had just been won by the Owensburg young men, whose triumph was emphasized by their having also been the victors in the previous game of a week before at the rival locality.

The return game of to-day had only been won after a close and brilliant contest, chiefly, it was freely acknowledged on both sides, through the extraordinary and versatile playing of the short stop of the college nine, Major Jack Falconbridge, better known throughout the country-side by his well-earned sobriquet of Short-Stop Maje.

He was not a student, as were his associates; he was, on the contrary, even a comparative stranger in the community, and had merely joined the team to fill a vacancy, apparently for his idle amusement a short time before, but was already the ruling headlight in the rather circumscribed sporting firmament of that section of country.

There was the usual wrangle about the umpire, a young farmer of the vicinity, the customary jubilation on the part of the victors, together with a corresponding state of depression or ill-humor among the defeated men, to which their respective partisans, as is mostly the case, contributed more noise and confusion than the partisans themselves, and there was even a fair prospect of the decision ending in a free fight.

"Let it go!" exclaimed Tom Briggs, catcher of the defeated Winghamptons, bursting out of an excited group, mainly composed of his fellow-discontents. "You college dudes," somewhat threateningly to a handsome, self-composed young man—Paul Eggleston, the pitcher of the victorious nine, "may be in high feather just now, but, what would you amount to without your short-stop—a disguised professional expert, and doubtless a sneaking gambler to boot, coming among you from no one knows where?"

There was a fierce roar of applause from his associates and partisans, most of them raw-boned, tough-built countrymen, with not a few more than half-parts drunk, and eager for a chance to make good at fisticuffs what they had lost at base-ball.

"Hectoring won't mend your case, Tom," retorted the young man addressed, with a quiet, good-natured air. Short-Stop Maje is not a professional, for that matter. We have his word to that effect, and he is a man of truth and honor."

Briggs was something of a fighter and a bully, a young giant of powerful physique, and generally acknowledged as the champion boxer and wrestler of the entire county.

"It ain't the truth!" he clamored, hotly, at the same time gesticulating violently with his brawny, clinched hands, which were not unlike hams in size and color, with arms to back them. "Short-Stop is a professional! His play betrays it, and even Mr. Fullhand, the rich gentleman and sport, who has been one of the spectators to-day, is sure of it."

"I noticed that he was betting on *your* team," was the satirical response.

"What of that? He isn't the gentleman to have his judgment biased by the loss of a few dirty dollars. I stick to it that your short-stop is an old-time professional, and whoever says the contrary is no stickler for the truth!"

Eggleston's face paled and hardened.

"It isn't fair for you to call my word in question here and at present, Tom Briggs," he said, still composedly. "You must know I am powerless to resent it just now, with any show of decency."

He had cast his glance suggestively toward a group of fashionably-attired spectators, including several ladies, not a great distance off; and Briggs, understanding the hint, nevertheless broke into a brutal and contemptuous guffaw, which was duly echoed by his satellites.

"Haw, haw, haw!" he blurted out; "so it's sweetheart Nettie Moore, the beauty of the village, and Widow Moore, her mother, whose presence you refer to, eh? But, are you so sure of an inning *there*, old boy? Mr. Fullhand 'pears to be mighty sweet on the girl, anyway, an' they do say—"

"Tom Briggs, stop! Another hint on that line, and it is at your peril!"

Paul Eggleston had grown as pale as death, save for the ominous gleam in his eyes, and he was advancing on the sneering giant when a firm touch on the arm restrained him, and a quiet voice said:

"This ought to be my quarrel, if any man's, Paul. I chanced to overhear the blackguard's remark, with regard to myself, which seems to have led to it."

Briggs guffawed louder than before, and he snapped his big fingers contemptuously at the speaker.

The latter was a well-knit, medium-sized man (our old friend, Major Jack Falconbridge, otherwise Old Falcon, of whom "Thunderbolt Detective" fame, in fact), whose physique appeared yet less formidable by reason of his close-fitting yet easy base-ball costume, and whose clean-shaven, close-cropped facial aspect, moreover, suggested a youthfulness far under his real age, though the piercing eagle gaze was undiminished in its silent forcefulness and penetration.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Briggs afresh; "so it's the little short-stop himself, eh, what pertends to be an amateur with the rest of us, but is really a professional and a gambler on the sly? Wal, my bantam, I take nothing back; I say it all over again, and—"

A quick slap in the face was the interruption.

Up went the huge hands of the ruffian, like the spokes of a fly-wheel, and—really lacking nothing of courage, though such a boaster—he rushed upon Short-Stop Maje with a hoarse roar, "Curse ye!"

But the latter, though unassuming in fighting as in intercourse, was a species of greased-lightning pugilist, minus the thunder, and in less than two minutes the bully was a superbly-thrashed man, artistically decorated, front, rear, basement and facade, with plenty to spare for French roof and skylights.

Not only this, but two of his backers, who would rashly have interfered in the decorative work, found themselves tumbled on the turf at their favorite's side, dazedly studying back-of-the-eyes astronomy with swimming faculties and disturbed equipose.

And, better yet, the whole thing had been performed with such nicety as scarcely to have attracted the attention of many of those not twenty yards distant, including Miss Moore and her mother.

"Wal, I'll swan!" observed Tom Briggs, coming to a sitting posture, with a comically crestfallen air. "Was them really fists, or brass knobs on the end of steam pistons, what done me up so everlastin' quick an' easy? I'll swan if I know which!"

"Get up, all of you!" ordered Short-Stop, smiling. "You're not half-bad fellows, if you'd only recognize limitations. Get up and shake yourselves together, and but few of the crowd on the campus will guess what has mischanced you."

This advice was speedily followed by the defeated trio, though they took care to slink off in the direction of the neighboring brook for temporary repairs; and the remaining group had hardly recomposed itself when the ladies alluded to, accompanied by their escorts, came strolling up.

"I say, young man!" said the most conspicuous of the new-comers, a large, middle-aged man, with the unmistakable New York City cut; "that was stunning in-and-out playing that you made throughout the match. I can afford to say so," with a pleasant laugh, "since it lost me fifty dollars to my friend here, Mr. Baldy Bricks, otherwise Curveshot Balder, the celebrated metropolitan umpire, of whom doubtless many of you have read or heard."

The individual referred to grinned. He was a somewhat dwarfish though powerfully-built man, with fiery red hair, a broad, cunning physiognomy, and the general aspect of a professional though gentlemanly city sport. The comely but somewhat careworn woman at his side was Mrs. Hannah Moore, at whose select boarding-house the two men had been stopping a week or more, ostensibly with the possible view of selecting a stock farm in the vicinity. The young lady in the elder man's company was her daughter, Nettie Moore, a singularly beautiful and thoughtful-looking young lady of nineteen or twenty—a blonde with dark eyes—who had instantly sought out Paul Eggleston from among the rest with a glad nod, accompanied by something of a blush, which, while responded to by a knidling glance and answering flush on Paul's part, had not escaped the observation of her companion.

Short-Stop Maje, to whom the more elderly man's compliment had been addressed, bowed modestly.

"You do me proud, sir, as they say in these parts," he replied. "Praise from Mr. Montague Fullhand is praise, indeed."

"I have a proposition to make to your nine," continued Mr. Fullhand, yet more amiably.

Short-Stop Maje turned deferentially to Pitcher Eggleston, who stepped forward, as the chief spokesman of the college young men.

"What would you propose, Mr. Fullhand?" asked Paul.

"Another match—a rubber—on the spot; that is, if you fellows are not too tired for it; and on condition that my experienced friend, Curveshot Balder, here, shall umpire the game. If you say yes, I'll cheerfully be the patron of the affair, and put up a purse of one hundred dollars, to go to the winning team, share and share alike."

There was a hurried and excited consultation among the rival players, and the proposition was acceded to with a jubilant shout.

"We're your men, sir!" cried Eggleston, eagerly; and the preliminaries of the match were forthwith expedited.

CHAPTER II. ON THE CAMPUS.

THE game that followed was even more exciting and closely contested than the regularly-arranged one that had preceded it, as the set event of the day.

It was also gained by the Owensburgers, once more chiefly owing to the exceptionally clever and brilliant work of Short-Stop Maje, and that in spite of frequent favoritism shown by the special umpire, Mr. Baldy Bricks, toward the defeated faction.

If the campus was a scene of tumult before, it was now scarcely less than that of a small riot, though a thoroughly good-natured one at last,

the Winghamptons accepting their final defeat with a fairly good grace, in which towering Tom Briggs—doubtless with his lesson in fisticuffs wholesomely in mind—was not the least conspicuous.

"It's a fair licking you've given us three times handrunning, boys," he freely acknowledged, while farewell handshakings and some hobnobbings were being exchanged pending the departure of the visiting contingent for their homes. "And it's all the more right for us chaps to acknowledge it, in view of the repeated unfairness of that durned red-headed umpire in our favor."

"That is so!" coincided several of his associates. "It was an infernal outrage on you college fellows, and an outsider might almost have suspected that we were standing in with Balder and Mr. Fullhand to beat you out by fair or foul."

"No one who knows you all could suspect that," assured Pitcher Paul Eggleston, right heartily, and with his good-humor thoroughly restored. "Good-by, Tom, and the rest of you! Better luck for you next time!"

"You certainly contested the fight like good ones," cried Catcher Chris. Payne, Eggleston's college chum. "The same old story—which we are free to acknowledge. What would we have done, and where would we have been, without our lightning short-stop here, Major Jack Falconbridge?"

The individual named made a deprecating gesture, with his accustomed modesty, and then stepped forward to participate in the generous hand-shaking and good-byes.

Then there was a parting cheer, followed by a three-times-three, and the Winghamptons were sent on their way in far better spirits than might have been expected of them.

"Here, gentlemen!" exclaimed a genial voice at this juncture, and smiling Mr. Fullhand, still accompanied by the comely widow and her lovely daughter—while Mr. Balder Bricks rather scowlingly brought up the rear of the group—was seen advancing with a bunch of greenbacks in his fist; "I am again a loser—this time for fifty apiece to your blacksmith and your hotel-keeper—by your prowess. But you are a ruck of capital good fellows, for all, and here are the stakes I promised to be divided among you."

Who could refuse amends when made with such genial and generous candor?

Paul Eggleston thanked him heartily as he accepted the money for his associates and himself, while at the same time Nettie Moore, with an eloquent glance of her deep, beautiful eyes, yet further delectated him by saying impulsively, though in a low voice:

"Oh, Paul—Mr. Eggleston, how glad I am that your nine won again! I shouldn't have slept well to-night if the game had gone against you. That is—"

She paused, drawing back to her mother's side apparently in some confusion at receiving a swift, perhaps a jealous, but at all events an uneasy, glance from Mr. Fullhand.

The latter, however, had overheard Short-Stop Maje addressed by his full or professional name a few moments previously, and was perhaps uneasy, if at all, chiefly on that account, though he certainly seemed an adept in masking his emotions at all times under a smiling and worldly exterior.

Nevertheless, while leaving Paul and some of his associates to chat gayly with Mrs. Moore and her daughter, he purposely avoided Mr. Bricks's attempt at propitiation with studied coldness, and sought an opportunity to speak to Short-Stop Maje slightly apart from the rest.

"Pardon me, my dear sir, if I make a mistake," said Mr. Fullhand, "but isn't it possible that you and I may have met before under very different circumstances—say, in the somewhat distant past?"

The Diamond-Field Detective had riveted the man just once with his keen, boring glance, but that was all.

"Possibly, sir," he quietly replied. "But," with a slight elevation of the brows, "it is a populous and varied world, in which passing and repassing faces are speedily forgotten."

"True, sir, true. But, I thought I heard you addressed as Major Jack Falconbridge by one of your young associates here."

"Not unlikely, sir. It is my name."

"Otherwise known as Old Falcon, the Thunderbolt Detective, besides yet other surnames?" Short-Stop Maje laughed lightly.

"Or now, perhaps, as Short-Stop Maje, the Diamond-Field Detective, at your service?" he supplemented, somewhat ironically. "Or, how would the Toss-and-Catch Trail-Seeker strike you? But really, Mr. Fullhand, I but seldom refer to my detective experiences, and your name—your present name," with a slightly significant emphasis—"was wholly unfamiliar to me before my chancing in these out-of-the-way parts a few weeks ago."

Mr. Fullhand bowed his excuses, and was apparently altogether relieved of some mental doubt.

"Doubtless I was mistaken in my impression," said he, politely. "Accept my renewed congratulations upon your fine play during the games."

With that, he bowed and turned, only to be confronted by Mr. Bricks, the whilom special umpire, who appeared anxious to speak with him.

"Not now, at least, sir—not now!" exclaimed Mr. Fullhand, with a pronounced displeasure that attracted general attention. "Your disgusting one-sidedness as umpire of the game was a little more than I can stand, especially when I make the humiliating reflection that it was at my request you assumed the role. I may be in a humor to listen to your explanations later on, sir, but not at present—not at present, if you please!"

The fellow turned pale through his freckles, scowled yet more discontentedly, and turned abruptly away; while Mr. Fullhand, still to all appearances quietly indignant, presently accompanied the ladies off the grounds.

"Here, Maje, old fellow," said Paul Eggleston, handing the short-stop a small roll of bills, "is your share of the cool hundred we scooped in by that little proposition of Fullhand's. A capital gentleman, eh, with nothing small or mean in his make-up? Come with me to my room. You'll have ample time to get ready for your hotel supper, and there are several things I want to confer with you upon—private matters, one might say." And he grew serious.

"At your service, of course," replied the detective, following at his side. "But wait!" he had looked over the money given him, and still held it flattened out in his hand, "here are twelve dollars."

"Certainly; eleven a-piece for the rest of the team, and the remainder, twelve dollars, for yourself. The deuce! don't look so stern, or shake your head, my friend, as if you didn't far more than deserve the odd dollar into your share. What would our play have amounted to without your superb personality in the game?"

"That is neither here nor there," insisted the detective, handing back one dollar of the money. "That will stand us all in for a capital after-supper cigar apiece, and don't you forget to apply it to some such distributive purpose, my young friend, or you and I may have a falling out."

Eggleston, who was in very high spirits, only laughed as he assentingly pocketed the note; and then they went chatting across the campus till they reached his lodgings, which were but a short distance from the one humble little "hotel" of the village, where Falconbridge made his quarters.

It should be mentioned, in passing, that the medical college buildings, handsomely situated on the outskirts of Owensburg, were solely devoted to the various branches of instruction supplied; the students, of whom there were several hundred—for it was a long-established institution of high reputation, and with a talented faculty, though offering its inducements on such terms as were designed to meet the aspirations of poor or only fairly-to-do young men—lodging and boarding promiscuously among the neighboring villagers and farmers.

"But you didn't offer any comment on my opening remark of a few moments ago," observed Eggleston, beginning to discard his sporting uniform as soon as he reached the privacy of his room, in which his companion had unceremoniously dropped into the best chair.

"What remark was that?" queried the other. "As to Mr. Fullhand being such a capital good fellow."

"Ah! Well, Paul, he is unquestionably one of the most capital and consummate good rascals at present unchanged."

CHAPTER III. FORESHADOWINGS.

THE totally unexpected reply caused Paul Eggleston to stare.

"What!" he asked; "you know this Fullhand, then?"

"Of him—yes; as I know of the devil and his attendant demons."

"Short-Stop, you surprise me."

"Very likely."

"Then Mr. Fullhand's amiability, worldly polish, *bonhomie*—"

"A fraud, a mockery and a snare."

"But with what princely carelessness he loses his money?"

"When he chooses to, with an object in view, yes."

"But his exorbitant contempt for Curveshot Balder's biased umpiring in that last game?"

"Put on—a clever piece of acting for our delusion—yours especially. A case of master and man, workman and tool, Bricks being the instrument."

"For my delusion especially, you say?"

"Just so."

"But to what possible end?"

"What! you, the preferred lover of Miss Nettie Moore, to ask such a question!"

Eggleston's dark face flushed, and his brow grew troubled.

"My first suspicions against the fellow kindled afresh!" he muttered, half to himself. "Falconbridge," loud and abruptly, "what do you, what can you, know about this man?"

"I have already confided to you that I am a New York detective, I believe."

"Yes."

"Well, it is on that man's account that I am here among you fellows."

"What! even to the extent of joining our college nine?"

"As a matter of course."

"Falconbridge," and Paul made no attempt to conceal his anxiety, "what you tell me doubtless nearly concerns Nettie Moore, and consequently myself?"

"Truly it does."

"I beseech you, therefore, to be frank and thorough with me in your charges against this man."

"Not now, Paul." And the detective rose to go. "You will probably confer with Miss Moore soon?"

"Yes, this evening."

"Good! She will doubtless have unexpected news for you. I saw it in her face. After that, if you feel you need me, seek me out."

"Be sure of that, old man. Is that all you will tell me now?"

"Yes, my friend."

"And all you have to say?"

"Yes; only"—and Old Falcon paused with his hand on the door—"one thing has always struck me as odd."

"What is that?"

"That you have never taken up your quarters in the Widow Moore's boarding-house, where you would have your sweetheart's safety more directly under your watch and guard."

Eggleston laughed.

"Do you take me for a Vanderbilt, in lieu of the poor struggling devil that I am—an orphaned farmer-lad, fighting, scrimping and striving for a doctor's diploma on the meager and hard-earned savings of my youthful toils?"

The detective's piercing eyes softened.

"Pardon me, Paul! I was not aware that you were in straightened circumstances."

"Oh, don't mention it!" with another forced laugh. "I have enough—a few hundreds—to see me through, I hope. But the bare idea of my living at Mrs. Moore's fashionable house, for the special accommodation of rich country tourists and idlers! Why, Chris Payne, once my chum, well fixed as he is, sometimes confesses that the high prices there fairly stagger him!"

"After you see Miss Moore, come and see me." And Short-Stop Maje held out his hand, which the other heartily clasped as they separated.

"What can be the mystery of that strange, eagle-eyed man masquerading here in this petty sporting part with us young fellows?" thought Eggleston, as he finished his preparations for supper at the neighboring economical tavern table. "Old Falcon! why, the man must have left a national reputation to come here among our simple mountain folk! And how closely he followed, too, upon the sojourn of Fullhand and Bricks at Mrs. Moore's house. Well, we shall see."

On his way to Mrs. Moore's, after supper, he met his gay young friend, Christopher Payne.

"I say, Paul!" exclaimed the latter; "there is a good idea on foot among some of us for the disposition of our six weeks' autumn vacation, which has already begun so auspiciously. Gad! but wasn't that in-playing of Short-Stop a caution to would-be contestants with us for the palm of the amateur diamond field?"

"What is your idea, Chris?"

"Well, it won't be anything unless you and Short-Stop join in it."

"Of course we'll do that without knowing what it is," Paul laughed. "Have a cigar, which already belongs to you, by the way." And Paul briefly related the story of the odd dollar in the stakes-division, much to his companion's satisfaction. "Now, to begin with, who is it that shares this good idea with you?"

"All the fellows of our victorious nine, save Short-Stop and yourself."

"And the proposition?"

"That we go strolling through the country, say as the Owensburg Striped Stockings, on a regular base-ball lark—and perhaps putting a little money in our pockets, besides reputation and lots of fun in our heads and bodies."

"Oho!" And Paul paused in thought.

"A capital cigar, this!" commented Chris, puffing with slow satisfaction at his weed.

"Well, what do you say?"

"The idea had occurred to me before."

"Why the deuce haven't you ventilated it, then?"

"You ought to guess, Chris," replied Eggleston, with a suggestion of sadness in his tone.

"But I don't."

"The rest of us are fairly well-to-do; I alone am poorer than Job's turkey. Half my little pile eaten away already, and my diploma still a year distant."

"The deuce! However, you have only yourself to look after."

"Do you forget my sister so soon?"

Payne flushed, while a melting look came into the gray eyes, mostly so careless and gay.

"Forget Drusilla Eggleston!" he exclaimed; "forget your occasional angel visitor from the adjoining county, who, for all you may swear to

the contrary, is as much handsomer than even blonde Nettie Moore herself, as the rich blue-black star-fretting of the summer midnight excels the mild luster of the noonday sky! Yes, when I forget to breathe!"

"Pshaw! But she is coming to-morrow, and you can tell her that sort of nonsense for her individual amusement."

"I am afraid she would perceive more cheek than heart in it, and that would never do. But, is she really coming to-morrow?" eagerly.

"Yes," with some reserve. "How about that touring idea?"

"Oh, yes!—our lost sheep, as you might say. *Revenons a nos moutons*. Well, your sister is independent of you in her school-teaching capacity, to say nothing of her amateur theatrical talent, with which, as I have frequently insisted, she might astonish the Thespian world."

"True."

"Then on this tour of ours we could probably win a lot of stakes."

"Or lose them."

"Not with Short-Stop as the captain of our team—or not often, at least—which I was going to propose, saving your presence, old fellow."

"That is worth thinking about. And, as for saving my presence, Falconbridge would be infinitely more effective than I, as captain and coacher."

"Good! we are going to interview him on our project without delay."

"But I am not in favor of playing for stakes."

"Neither am I. Here's what I can do, though. Let me lend you what money you will want."

"No, no; I would pay my own way, or not go."

"Say yes, then."

"I will think it over, and see you later on. In the mean time, do you fellows talk it over with Short-Stop."

"All right!"

But, as Eggleston turned to continue his way, Payne called him back, with a hesitant, reluctant air.

"I want to give you a word as to Nettie, old fellow—something you ought to know."

"What is it?"

"That swell, Fullhand, is after her for all he is worth, and I think, with the widow's fullest sanction. I fancy that the young lady herself, though, both fears and dislikes the man. *Au revoir!* A word to the wise is sufficient."

He hurried away before another question could be asked, leaving Eggleston a prey to fresh uneasiness and doubt.

CHAPTER IV.

NETTIE MOORE.

PAUL, however, had hardly entered the spacious and handsome grounds surrounding Mrs. Hannah Moore's fashionable country boarding-house, when a well known figure, whose willowy grace and fawn-like rhythm of movement set his heart to beating tumultuously, came flitting down the dusky garden-path to meet him.

It was Nettie Moore herself.

"Oh, Paul—Mr. Eggleston—"

"Always Paul, and Paul only, to you, let me hope, Nettie."

"Yes, then; that is, I suppose so. But— Oh, dear! I am too flurried to speak to you connectedly."

He saw that she was, indeed, unwontedly excited, if not actually alarmed, and forthwith gently led the way to a rustic bench, in a somewhat retired nook not far away from the path.

"Now, Nettie," he said, in the softly resolved tone that was never without a strong effect upon the beautiful young girl. "I want you to compose yourself thoroughly before you attempt to tell me anything at all. Will you do so?"

"I'll—I'll try, Paul," with the dark eyes lowered—she was one of those rare blonde beauties with eyes so deeply, darkly violet as to often suggest the impression that they were black.

"To help you along, then, let me speak first. I love you, Nettie."

"What a quieting, sedative announcement to begin with!" And the downcast eyes looked up with an arch glance.

"Perhaps it ought to be by this time," murmured the young man, gloomily, "since it's hardly the first or the twentieth time I have made it—and never yet with a serious response from you, at that."

She suddenly drew a little away, and then looked him bravely, unflinchingly in the face, notwithstanding that her lip quivered and the native sunniness of her beauty was clouded with troubled thoughts.

"You shall not justly accuse me of superficialness again, Paul, even by implication," she said. "No," determinedly, "however sordidly my mother may remain prejudiced against your struggling poverty and the rest of it!"

"What do you, what can you mean, Nettie?"

"Take your answer at last, Paul," the sweet eyes again drooping. "It is hardly my fault that you have had to wait so long for it, and I am in need of all the support, all the sympathy

I can get now. I *do* love you, Paul Eggleston."

With a low, joyful cry, he caught her to his heart.

"I must be dreaming—I can't realize it!" he faltered, showering his burning kisses unrestrained upon the beautiful fair face, whose crimsoning blushes even the deepening gloaming could not hide away. "You love me, Nettie, me, and will one day be my bride?"

"Yes, Paul, if Fate so wills." She gently but firmly disengaged herself from his embrace. "Assuredly, though, I shall never be any other man's—more especially that man's!" And she shuddered.

"What does this all mean, my beloved? You fill me with agonizing anxiety for your safety! Is it that specious man, Montague Fullhand, to whom you shudderingly allude?"

"Yes, yes; God help me!"

"Ha! then my secret misdoubts as to the seeming disinterestedness of his attentions were not premature. Speak, my darling! By the way, it was with reference to that man that you were to give me some sort of glad news?"

"There is yet more now—the reverse of glad, I am sure."

"In Heaven's name, explain, dearest. Let me not, I beseech you, burst with ignorance, as Hamlet says."

"Paul, Paul! you saw how agitated and flighty I was at first?"

"Yes."

"I had just torn myself, furious and indignant from that polished scoundrel's insulting arms, or at least from his attempted embrace!"

Eggleston's breathing grew labored, and there was something in his stern, set face not particularly good to see.

"Listen, and I will try to give you a connected story," the young lady went on, with forced composure. "You have perhaps wondered why my mother—who is such a shrewd, penetrating woman, in spite of her comfort-loving worldliness—should have been so taken with this Mr. Fullhand almost from the very first?"

"Yes, yes."

"You know how we were rich before coming here—before my poor father sunk his fortune in a mysterious silver-mine, and then died of heart-disease (more likely heart-break), without even telling us the name or particulars of the unfortunate investment?"

"Yes; from general report, and what I have occasionally gathered from your mother and yourself."

"Well, Mr. Fullhand was my father's trusted friend and partner in the investment."

"Ha! he doubtless says so."

"More than that, Mamma is sure of his truthfulness, by reason of certain admissions on his part that could only come from one once deep in my father's confidence."

"Admissions! But your father had a half-brother, one Montgomery Moore, who disappeared with the capital stock of the company?"

"Yes; to the fatal ruin of my father, and the temporary ruin of Mr. Fullhand."

"Ah! well?"

"Well, according to Mr. Fullhand, the mine has undergone a boom, as they call it, and is now paying prodigious dividends. Our stock, as I may say, is now held, through fraudulent transfers, by my Uncle Montgomery, who is calmly reaping the golden harvest of the same."

"Zounds! And does Mr. Fullhand offer to authenticate all these astonishing declarations?"

"Yes, on one condition; without which he will remain forever silent. He shows his full hand at last, as he doubtless considers it, and is inexorable."

"But what is the condition demanded?"

"That I first become his wife."

Eggleston started.

"The cowardly villain!" he growled, clinching his strong hand.

"You may well say that."

"But you spoke of his offering to embrace you against your will."

"Yes. I suppose he forgot himself for the moment, or despaired of mamma ever being able to induce me to turn other than a deaf ear to his suit, as she has most likely promised me over and over again. But he knows what I think of him *now*! Thank God! he can be in no uncertainty of my loathing and contempt for him henceforth."

"Good! You gave it to him pretty strong, oh, Nettie?"

"Yes, I *did*! Ah!" with another little shiver; "that is the worst of it."

"What do you allude to?"

"The last look on his face—oh, it was terrible, so resolved, so deadly! And then his parting words!"

Paul could scarcely contain his anger.

"What were his words?"

"These: 'Proud, foolish beauty, mine you shall be, and soon at that, sooner than you dream! I swear it!'"

"The villain!"

"Imagine these words hissed into my ear, with a deadly intensity which I cannot impart to them—and from one who had theretofore been the very soul of considerate and profound

courteousness to me, even when evidently aware of the distaste with which I had persisted in meeting my mother's subtle and varied suggestions of his suit."

"I can imagine it. The scoundrel! the unmanly villain!"

"At first I was almost beside myself with terror. What it is I know not, but I feel there is a deadly sort of mesmeric or hyp-hypnotic (that is the word) power about that man. It makes me shudder when I think of it. I fear that, if he should once get me under his unrestrained influence, he might be able to bend me to his will and inclinations as a reed in the breath of the hurricane."

"He shall not get you in his power—the scoundrel!"

"God forbid that he should!"

After a long pause, in which the young man regained something of his wonted composure, he said:

"This scoundrelly half-brother of your father, this whilom absconder, Mr. Montgomery Moore, now said to be fattening on the profits of your inheritance, is there no way of gaining access to him, save through this man's information or instrumentality?"

"Mamma thinks not. Little good it would do us if we could, most probably! He was always inimical to her, personally, and is, moreover, doubtless so intrenched in the possession of our fortune as to defy either our threats or our prayers."

"This is somewhat extraordinary. What was he like, as you remember him?"

"I never saw him to my knowledge."

"No?"

"Never. I was a mere child when my father died, leaving us quite poorly off, though not so destitute as later on, when my mother, through the assistance of friends, was enabled to start the boarding-house here. And my Uncle Montgomery had never been much of a visitor at our home."

"But what was his personal appearance, as your mother recollects him?"

"Her description of him is hardly satisfactory. She only remembers him as a very hairy-faced man, with a hypocritically insinuating voice and manner, and the character of whose features was hardly visible by reason of their exceptional shagginess. I have heard her characterize him as a sort of human Yorkshire terrier with the manners of a saint and the voice of an angel."

"Ah!"

"Dear Paul! let us talk no more at present of these distressing things when," with a love-lighted look, "we have our love for each other to engross our thoughts."

The appeal was such as to thrill the young man anew with a sense of his delectableness, and once again they were in one another's arms; while the golden moments, counted by sighs and punctuated by "kisses sweeter, sweeter than anything on earth," silently lapsed away into the loving bosom of the night.

CHAPTER V.

MR. FULLHAND'S BOLD PLAY.

AFTER a lingering separation from his dear love, and straining his eyes in pursuit of her beautiful figure until its last outlines were lost in the dimness of the shrubbery-shaded path, Paul Eggleston had a vaguely sweet impression of retracing his course with a sort of dreamily-floating locomotion that can only be characterized by the somewhat hackneyed expression of walking on the air.

Indeed, so supremely happy was he in the consciousness of his love, and the still not wholly realized blessedness of having it returned by the adored idol of his dreams, the most perfect of her sex, and all that sort of thing, as to be wholly oblivious of everything else for the time being.

The insolence of Mr. Fullhand's presumptuousness was obliterated from his mind; the fact of his brethren of the college nine probably in anxious waiting for his decision as to the projected sporting tour was a lost and wandering mote in the raging glamour of his exaltation; and even the stubborn truth of his poverty, and hopelessly low-down position on the ladder that he must yet mount toilsomely, rung by rung, and to no inconsiderable altitude, before he could think of sanely demanding a life possession of his blonde angel at the altar's foot, were happily cold realisms, altogether of a dismalness beyond the bright wand-stroke of that enchanted hour.

They all do it, they all do it! Such is the divine fool's paradise of love. Such it has been from the pristine quickening of the human heart at the mystic command of beauty or nameless charm in woman, or of responsive attributes in man; such it is now, intensified and yet refined out of the chastening bosom of past ages; such it will be to all eternity, and when even the great globe itself shall, in the sublime nihilism of Shakespeare, have faded like the insubstantial fabric of a vision, leaving not a wrack behind.

Paul, however, was abruptly recalled to the prosaic matters of every-day life by nearly running into a man, just outside the grounds

gate, who muttered first an oath, then an apology, and seemed somewhat unwilling to be recognized, though without avail.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Bricks!" said Eggleston, a little curtly. "Good-evening to you."

"The same to you, Mr. Eggleston," was the rather rough response.

"You are not with your friend, Mr. Fullhand, this evening?"

"Fullhand be cursed!" imprecated the other, with an oath, and such apparent sincerity of vehemence, that Paul was disposed to think Short-Stop Maje had been mistaken as to the continued secret understanding between the two adventurers. "He's no friend of mine, young fellow, and I don't thank any one for calling him such."

"Oho!" And, with a word or two of half-apology, Eggleston went on his way.

A few minutes later, however, just as he was turning into the village street on which Old Falcon's hotel lodgings were located, a furiously-driven coach whirled by in the direction of the railroad station, doubtless intent upon the ten o'clock Eastern Express train, whose approaching signal had been shrilled out on the night air a moment beforehand, and he was certain that Mr. Bricks was seated on the box-seat at the driver's side.

"Hallo!" thought Paul; "I shall have the rig on Short-Stop's prediction at last. Curveshot Balder is evidently deserting his quondam patron in a huff, and no mistake; though how the deuce he can make use of all those trunks and portmanteaus piled and stacked behind that coach is a mystery. Well, well; good riddance for one; and when rogues fall out, good men may come to their own."

And he good-humoredly resumed his way.

Had he but known the truth—had he but guessed, had he but suspected it! But it is only a repetition of Touchstone's everlasting, interposing If, which is no less a mar-all than a peace-maker in this jumbling whirligig of a world.

Arriving at the tavern, Paul found all the remaining members of the victorious college nine having a mildly hilarious jollification in the tap-room, which they were having all to themselves, saving the genial landlord's presence, and at Major Falconbridge's expense.

Eggleston's entrance was signalized by a well-coming burrah.

"Well-fetched and well-come!" shouted Catcher Chris Payne, waving his glass over his head. "Here, Paul! only your consent is wanting, and the deed is done."

Under any other circumstances Eggleston's flushed and joyous appearance, fresh from the triumph of his love, would have been remarked and commented upon, but now it was regarded as nothing more than a natural reflection of the general hilarity.

"Hooray!" cried First-Base Tompkins, a likely young fellow of twenty-two from the Niagara county tier, while Fielder Jones, another crack player and not very brilliant student, clapped him between the shoulder-blades: "Paul Eggleston forever! He's with us, sure, and, with Short-Stop as our coach and captain, we'll pass through the country districts jus' like—jus' like a dose of salts, by Jingo!"

Short-Stop Maje had only looked up, with his quiet but genial nod.

Some of the young men still retained their sporting costumes—looking somewhat the worse for the night they were making of it—and all, with the single exception of the last named, were seeming more or less unduly exhilarated.

"Yes!" cried Paul, stepping smilingly forward; "I'm with you, boys. Count me in for the base-ball tour. What arrangements have been made?"

Every one, for answer, turned sort of deferentially toward Short-Stop Maje.

"We're to start day after to-morrow, Paul, unless a first challenge should hurry us up in the interim," returned the latter, with an easy air of delegated authority, as to the manner born. "A declaration of our intentions will appear in the *Owensburg Trumpet* to-morrow morning, with a conspicuous display."

At the same time the falcon eyes sought out Eggleston's with a covertly searching and inquiring look, that could not but be understood as bearing upon the subject of the recent consultation between the two.

Before Paul could respond to it with a few whispered words apart, hurried steps, evidently accompanied by rushing skirts, were heard outside, instantly followed by a hard knock on the tap-room door.

"Why, Ellen, you're whiter than a sheet!" exclaimed the young man, as Landlord Billy Barker gave entrance to the new arrival. "Wh—what has chanced? Can you have brought a message from Miss Moore for me?"

A general silence had fallen upon all, for Paul's secret was shared more or less by all his intimates, and the new-comer, who was pale with excitement and half-breathless, as from hard running, was recognized as the popular chambermaid of Mrs. Moore's establishment, who was something of a trusted *confidante* in Nettie Moore's good graces.

"Wurra, wurra! everything of bad luck has chanced, Mather Paul," cried Ellen, catching

her breath at every word, and all but wringing her hands. "Faix, I may lose me place for fetchin' wur-rd av it till yez, but I could na' help it, wid the toormoil that is in the house beyant. Och, wurra, wurra! me swate young lady, Miss Nettie—"

"Speak!" Paul hoarsely urged, for she had come to a breathless pause. "All are my friends here. What has chanced to your young lady?"

"Och, wurra, wurra!"

"Out with it, woman! Is Miss Nettie taken suddenly ill?"

"Worse nor that, sor!"

"Speak, I tell you!"

"She's kidnapped, sor—though belike wid her own mither's connivance, for all I know! Mither Fullhand, wid that red-headed spalpeen Mither Bricks's assistance, has kerried her off by the railroad beyant!"

Eggleston staggered back, and struck his forehead with his fist.

"Fool that I was!" he muttered. "That heap of luggage with the hackney-coach, and Bricks himself on the box! Oh, why didn't I suspect the truth?"

"Friends of the Owensburg Base-Ball Nine," observed Short-stop Maje, coming briskly forward, when some further particulars of Miss Moore's abduction had been evolved, "we have now additional incentive for our traveling tour—the rescue of the young lady, and vengeance upon her scoundrelly abductor!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE OATH OF THE NINE.

THE other members of the college team were swift to catch fire from the Diamond-Field Detective's inspiring words.

Ten minutes later, Ellen Doherty, the bearer of the startling intelligence, having been sent back to her employment with becoming thanks, a *douceur* and a caution, and it having been decided that immediate pursuit of the abductors and their victim was not the wisest course, if not wholly out of the question, the nine perfected their course of action in a long, low apartment, adjoining the tap-room of the Blue Boar, as the old-time hostelry was designated, where yet greater privacy was secured.

The pros and cons of the subject had been thoroughly weighed, and the decision formally resolved upon on the line of action suggested by Short-Stop Maje, when the latter slowly arose at the table around which they were sitting, and, laying his hand gently on Paul Eggleston's shoulder, said, with quiet impressiveness:

"Gentlemen, it is then fully understood, I presume, that our ball-playing tour is to be conducted mainly with the view of following up the scoundrelly abductor of Miss Moore—and that the sphere of the National Game is the most likely one in which to get on the track of a professional sport of Mr. Fullhand's pronounced proclivities you have my professional experience—to the end of bringing him and his confederate to justice, and effecting the deliverance of the young lady?"

There was a general assent, Paul himself, who was pale but sternly composed, merely nodding his head, without a sound issuing from his tightly-compressed lips, though, if eyes could speak, his would have been a language of cold steel at that juncture.

The Diamond-Field Detective continued:

"And it is furthermore agreed, as I understand it, that I am selected as the captain of this team, with fully conferred, indisputable and despotic authority as to the government and direction of our future movements, with that laudable end in view?"

This likewise was concurred in, without a dissenting voice or look.

"It is well," resumed the detective. "Stand up, all of you, and clasp hands over the oath I am about to propose in vindication of the personal affront that has been put upon our dear brother here, Paul Eggleston, in the wrong and indignity undergone by his betrothed lady-love!"

The oath was administered and accepted in simple but fitting terms.

Old Uncle Billy Barker, the characteristic boniface of the Blue Boar, who was entering with refreshments from the tap-room at the time, and in whose discretion the most implicit confidence was placed, was so deeply impressed by the gravity and solemnity of the ceremony—which, under other circumstances and with older participants, might have dangerously edged upon the ridiculous—that he paused midway in the door, glasses in hand, mouth open, bald head thrown back, and watery eyes fairly popping out of his head, a rough-framed picture of awed old age and stupefied unsophistication, like a dazed Silenus at the sacrificial rites of Iacchus.

"Lord save us and bless us!" he muttered; "eff it don't beat the Pirates of the Proud Pennant an' the Vivid Avengers of the Violet Lagoon, I'm a Dutchman!" And he forthwith completed his errand upon tiptoes, and with a generally crushed and mystified expression.

Paul Eggleston alone remained standing at the table when the oath of compact had been

severally taken by the young men who had thus constituted themselves the sharers in his misfortune and the sworn avengers of his cause.

"My friends, my brothers-in-arms upon the diamond field!" he faltered, in a voice which he vainly strove to render firm, "I thank you, and I accept your devotion. Words are denied me to say more at present."

He sat down with a quivering lip, but to any one observant of the fierce yet coldly-resolved light kindling in his dark eyes it was sufficiently evident that it would go hard with Montague Fullhand, should the two men, howsoever, the existing disparity in years and worldly experience, chance to come together on anything like equal physical conditions.

"Speech from our new captain, Short-Stop Falconbridge!" cried First-Base Tompkins, lighting a fresh pipe.

"Hear! hear!" seconded First-Fielder Jones, whose parents were Welsh, and consequently Britishers, though the Stars and Stripes had long been more than good enough for their sturdy descendant.

"That's talk!" chimed in Catcher Chris Payne; while yet others hammered on the table with their glasses, and looked expectantly at Old Falcon.

"Well, what would you have me say, my friends?" asked the latter, composedly.

"Just about this, Cap," said Payne, answering by tacit agreement for the others. "We know of you by your professional reputation, apart from our personal knowledge of you. We're in this thing, oath-bound, to the bitter end. We are therefore unreservedly under your direction, resolved to follow your guidance and obey your commands to the letter. At the same time it is the general impression that you have all along been tracking and shadowing this Montague Fullhand—"

"He'll need to have a full hand, and a durned full one at that, to escape our combined pursuit, we are thinking!" interrupted Tompkins. "But excuse me, Chris, and cut ahead."

"Tracking and shadowing this duck, Montague Fullhand on your own account, which would explain the heretofore mystery of your quiet and observant sojourn among us Owensburgers," Payne concluded his sentence, looking the detective meanwhile full in the face. "Eh?"

Falconbridge simply nodded.

"Well," continued the young man, "seeing as we are all free volunteers in this enterprise, sir, would it be too presumptuous on our part to request an inkling of what you may already know about the cuss, as to how, if at all, your private pursuit may aid in our general object in hand; and all that sort of thing?"

"In other and fewer words," interposed the detective, gravely, "you would know if I can take you into my private confidence in this matter, within reasonable bounds?"

"That's the bull's-head, captain. You see, we might pull together all the more effectively, if a little better informed as to the merits of the vivisection generally proposed. See?"

"Vivisection ain't bad," commented Fielder Jones, with a guffaw. "But vivisectioning may suit us better, if we can only get our subject on the dissection table of our mad desires."

"You request nothing more than is fair," replied Short-Stop Maje, turning to Chris Payne, after a moment's reflection. "Suppose you, then, my friend, as seemingly well-primed with the justifiable curiosity of all our friends present, proceed with such queries as enlightenment is most needed upon. I regard you as my brethren in this mission; and any information that you ought to know from me shall be cheerfully supplied."

"Thank you, Cap!" And Catcher Payne forthwith seemed to square himself for any chance balls on the fly, while the others were all attention. "I'll go right into you bluntly enough, then."

"Go ahead."

"You were then secretly on the track of this Fullhand?"

"Yes."

"You became a member of our nine chiefly with a view to studying his gambling methods?"

"Yes."

"Is the man Fullhand other than he seems?"

"It is my hope to prove him such."

"In what other identity do you hope to establish him?"

"It is not relevant for that to be generally known. I will answer this much by saying, however: In the identity of one of the most consummate and dangerous of evil-doers."

"Were you taken by surprise by the announcement of Miss Moore's mishap in connection with this adventurer?"

"I have been anticipating something of the sort from the first."

"What! And you would suggest no warning?"

"On the contrary, I have repeatedly warned Mr. Eggleston to beware of the man, and bid Mrs. Moore and her daughter mistrust his motives."

"It is true," said Paul. "But it was of no use. Nettie persisted in being unsuspicious almost, but not quite, to the last. Her mother,

simply regarding me as a jealous and intermeddling fool, wouldn't listen to me at all."

"What shall be your first step in this matter, apart from our united action?"

"To have some plain words with Mrs. Moore at her earliest convenience to-morrow morning."

"In the mean time, what would you suggest?"

"That we separate and go to bed, without further delay."

There was a general laugh at this reply, which was acted upon forthwith.

CHAPTER VII.

A WORLDLY WIDOW.

EARLY on the following morning Old Falcon, otherwise Short-Stop Maje, the Diamond-Field Detective, sent the following telegram to a down-town New York address:

"MR. THOMAS DODD:—Report in course of forenoon present and recent whereabouts of Mr. Montgomery Moore, Secretary of the Zorilla Sierra Madres Silver Mining Company (Limited), together with other particulars of interest to me, and then be on the lookout for an order to join me at any moment. J. F."

At breakfast the detective was joined by Paul Eggleston, who looked as if he had passed a miserable night.

"Of course you will accompany me to Mrs. Moore's," said Short-Stop.

Paul looked up in surprise.

"Nothing will suit me better, if you advise it," he returned. "I thought you were intending to interview the widow alone."

"It was my first intention, but, on turning it over, I think it will be better for you to introduce me."

"Certainly, though little good it will do, I fancy. Nettie's mother is of the world worldly, and I haven't a doubt that she was privy to the abduction."

"That remains to be seen, though I shall perhaps tell the lady a thing or two that will open her eyes with a snap."

"They're rather accustomed to snapping, you'll find," hopelessly.

"Then they shall water, for a change. Dignified unremonstrativeness on your part is all I ask of you."

"I shall do my best to meet your expectations, Falconbridge, though I confess that the sordid disdain and selfishness of the pretty widow is apt to set my temper on edge."

"Leave it all to me."

"Of course. But set my anguish at rest, if you can, with regard to Nettie."

"I'll do that."

"Where is she now?—what can this scoundrel have done with her?"

"Doubtless placed her somewhere in enforced seclusion, probably somewhere in the vicinity of New York City, there to remain until she shall consent to be his wife, unless we rescue her in the mean time, which, of course, we shall do."

"But how could her abduction have been effected, so hard upon my last evening's interview with her?"

"Perhaps, and most probably, under the influence of chloroform. Curveshot Balder was holding the carriage in readiness when you met him at the gate."

"And the pile of baggage accompanying the abduction?"

"Part of it Miss Nettie's own, depend upon it. Her mother will doubtless advance that fact as a proof that her daughter went off willingly enough—that it was less of a kidnapping than an elopement. You will see that the widow's line of action will bear me out in this assumption."

"But how about the note of explanation that Ellen Doherty said Miss Moore left for her mother's edification?"

"And which none of the rest of the household would take any stock in?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Well, we will simply demand the production of that note—which, of course, doesn't exist."

"One thing more."

"What is it?"

"Shall you inform Mrs. Moore as to your fore-suspensions of Fullhand's character—as to your own secret shadowings of the man up to this time?"

"Yes, and by so doing, open your eyes wider than the widow's."

Eggleston stared.

"What do you mean?"

"You must wait and see."

"Is it possible that you imagine Nettie capable of having deceived me?"

The detective gave his short laugh.

"Make yourself easy. My revelation shall have nothing to do with Miss Moore, though with one perhaps scarcely less dear to you."

Paul's mystification was now complete, but, as he knew from experience that Old Falcon was never to be persuaded against a set purpose, he held his peace and, a few minutes later, they set out for Mrs. Moore's house.

Ellen Doherty passed them as they were being ushered into the reception-room, after sending their cards to the mistress of the house.

"Don't let the purty witch humbug you," she hurriedly whispered. "She'll purtind to be all bruck up, but her eyes air as dhry as a bone, an' it was herself as packed up me poor young leddy's things."

Mrs. Hannah Moore was a very handsome, even distinguished-looking woman, and she was perfectly aware of it.

In receiving her visitors, she honored the detective with a slightly inquisitive stare, recognized his companion with a little disdainfully condescending nod, and then, motioning them to be seated, gracefully subsided into the most luxurious easy-chair in the room to the most advantageous revelation of her attractive figure, which was appearing at its best in tasteful morning wrapper of garnet-colored satin, with elaborate pleatings and a lace front.

She was less pronouncedly blonde than her daughter, and had doubtless at one time been equally beautiful, but with almost none of the soft gentleness of demeanor that was one of Nettie's chief charms. Mrs. Moore's eyelids were reddened, as if she might have been weeping, but her manner was thoroughly composed, not to say somewhat vigilant and distrustful.

Rudely ignoring Eggleston's presence, she at once addressed herself exclusively to Falconbridge, notwithstanding that the somewhat mesmeric power of the latter's remarkable eyes, which he had kept fixed steadfastly but respectfully upon her from the very first, seemed to cause her both surprise and uneasiness, which, however, she managed to dissemble with the *sang froid* of a clever woman.

"Mr. Falconbridge, I believe the name was, sir?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"If you are looking for accommodations, I may as well say at the outset that, though my boarders are now few in number, my patronage is select and my prices high."

"I am not looking for accommodations, ma'm; though," with a glance of superlative admiration that comprehended his elegant surroundings and the lady herself as their appropriate center, "surely a prince of the blood, with the purse of a Fortunatus at his command, could not but be charmed with such as might be offered him here."

The pleased smile of the lady was sufficient evidence that the compliment had not been wasted.

"You are too good, sir. But, since you are not looking for board, to what, pray, am I indebted for the honor of your visit?"

"Ah, madam!" and the detective counterfeited a shyness of manner he was far from feeling; "the evident refinement of your presence makes me hesitate to announce it. I find myself tongue-tied—lost, as it were—now that I am before you!"

For all her shrewdness, Mrs. Moore was little less than beaming now.

"Nay, sir, speak!" she cooed. "The honor of this visit is then prompted—?"

"By your daughter's abduction! Madam, I am a professional detective."

If Short-Stop Maje was fond of affording abrupt surprises, his predilection was gratified at this moment.

The lady blackened like a thundercloud. The professional detective was, to her mind, *sui generis*, a shabby, sneaking, highly objectionable personage, about half-hog and half-thief.

"What!" she snapped out; "so you have also got hold of that absurd fiction? I shall dismiss every servant in my employ if I can trace it back to them! Perhaps," turning to Eggleston with withering anger, "I am partly indebted to you, sir, for the dissemination of the rumor? The ideal! As if the affair were not bad enough as it is, without this additional absurdity. There was no abduction. It is simply and horribly this: My daughter has systematically deceived me, and has eloped with Mr. Fullhand. Or you might call it an unnecessary elopement, since my consent would not have been withheld from the marriage. That is all. I will not have the matter discussed, least of all by—by beggarly students and detectives!" The last words with contemptuous emphasis.

"Madam," interposed the detective with grave suavity, "you force upon me the suggestion of a line from the poet Tennyson, England's Poet Laureate."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes, ma'm. It is this one, from his *Maud*: 'You wrong your beauty by being so proud.'"

Mrs. Moore gorged the compliment, but was too angry to be appeased by it.

"Sir, I may wrong my beauty," she said, loftily, "but I must continue to refuse having my domestic affairs interfered with. Though I cannot countenance his proceeding with regard to my daughter—who, by the way, is of age, and therefore able to decide for herself—Mr. Montague Fullhand is a gentleman in whom I have every confidence."

"So at one time had your late husband, I believe," returned Old Falcon, changing his tone. "Apart from the man's violent abduction of your daughter—"

"Elopement with my daughter, if you please."

"Apart from this matter, I have every rea-

son to believe the man a swindler, a robber, and—a murderer!"

Mrs. Moore turned pale.

"Mr. Fullhand a murderer!" she faltered.

"I intend to prove him as such."

"Whom could he have murdered?"

"Your husband."

She looked at him in genuine fright and astonishment.

"Can you be in your senses, sir?"

"I trust that I am, ma'm."

CHAPTER VIII.

SOME SURPRISES.

"BUT, sir," continued the widow, regaining something of her composure, "such a charge—apart from its being made against a gentleman of Mr. Fullhand's standing—is necessarily preposterous."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. My husband could not have been murdered. He died of heart disease in my arms."

"True; but of a shock purposely timed to carry him off at a critical crisis of his ailment—the intelligence of his half-brother's treachery, and the loss of his fortune."

"Your charge is far-fetched, sir. Such a shock, I grant, was the immediate cause of my husband's death. But his villainous half-brother, Mr. Montgomery Moore, was the cause of it, in his infamous conduct. I did not even know Mr. Fullhand then as my husband's associate—in fact, had never heard of him."

"Doubtless not; and yet Fullhand was his business associate, and it was chiefly through him that the fatal shock was conveyed."

"I do not believe it, sir."

"You will one day."

"No, no! Why, Mr. Fullhand is at present the President of the great Zorilla Sierra Madres Silver Mining Company."

"Of which the scoundrel, Montgomery Moore, is the secretary."

"So I have been given to understand."

"The man who disappeared with your husband's money, or whose flight caused the loss of his investment—the man who robbed you and your daughter of your inheritance!"

"Mr. Fullhand will compel a settlement in our favor."

"I know he bargained to do so, as the price of your daughter's hand in marriage."

"Sir!"

"Oh, my dear lady, you must accept plain English from me! Your daughter despised the man and his offer; therefore you furthered her abduction at his hands last night."

Mrs. Moore arose, crimson with anger now; but the detective went on imperturbably:

"What I charge can be proved, if necessary. Mrs. Moore, I hear you have a letter, left behind by your daughter, informing you that she had gone off with this man of her own consent."

"It is true."

"I defy you to produce the letter!"

Mrs. Moore bit her lip, and took refuge in her indignation.

"I do not produce my correspondence at the dictation of detectives!"

"No, nor at the dictation of any one else, not even of your own conscience, fair madam, when you don't happen to have any to produce."

"Sir, you are insulting."

"By no means; only truthful."

"I must beg you, I must insist on your terminating this interview!"

"Not till I have concluded it. The rescue of your daughter shall be attended to, in spite of your own sordid disregard for her welfare, ma'm. It shall be duly accomplished in the interest of my excellent young friend, Mr. Eggleston, here, who is the young lady's betrothed, and whose gentlemanly self-control and forbearance during this conversation I cannot adequately commend."

Mrs. Moore gave a contemptuously derisive laugh, which caused Paul to compress his lips, but scarcely interrupted the detective in the least.

"My part in the affair," the latter went on, "was merely to inform you, ma'm, of the manner of man into whose base hands you have so ruthlessly played, at the risk of your beautiful daughter's reputation and happiness. He is a consummate scoundrel. For weeks I have been tracking him, in my professional capacity, with a view to bringing home to him one of his lesser and more recent crimes—a heartless burglary."

The last charge arrested Mrs. Moore's attention.

"A burglary!" she repeated, almost with amusement. "Come, now; we are getting along, it seems. Montague Fullhand a burglar?"

"I shall prove him as such, together with his confederate, Mr. Baldwin Hitchcock, alias Mr. Baldy Bricks, alias Umpire Balder, or Curve-shot Balder—you lose your money, and you take your choice."

"Aliases are not in my line, sir."

"Fullhand might help you out with 'em, ma'm."

"And what is Mr. Montague Fullhand, President of the Zorilla Sierra Madres Silver Mining Company, accused of burglarizing, sir?"

"Burglarizing is good, ma'm; and I am glad to see you so interested in a side-issue. He is strongly suspected of having stolen three thousand dollars, the property of a client of mine, and representing the hard-earned savings of years."

"Ha, ha, ha! And your client's name, sir?—'Client' is also good, by the way."

"Excellent, ma'm. In this instance, it is a young lady—Miss Drusilla Eggleston—the older sister of my young friend here."

Old Falcon had said that he would open Paul's eyes, and there was no doubt that he had done so.

The young man uttered a low exclamation, while Mrs. Moore was only less astonished than he.

"So!" cried the latter; "Drusilla Eggleston has engaged you in her case, sir?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"And she accused Mr. Fullhand of having stolen her money?"

"I have engaged to prove him as the master-thief, assisted by Bricks, his confederate."

"Mr. Montague Fullhand the pilferer of a schoolmarm's savings! A man able and accustomed to drawing his check daily for tens of thousands!"

"Especially when the drafts are on other people's funds! But circumstantial evidence is strong against him, in Miss Eggleston's affair, I assure you."

"Let me review them. Mr. Fullhand was haunting a base-ball match (his aristocratic hobby) in the neighborhood of Miss Eggleston's residence."

"Hearing that she had money she was anxious to invest profitably, he made occasion to call on her at her cottage home, accompanied by Bricks of the numerous aliases, and present the prospectus and tables of the Zorilla Company."

"Miss Eggleston had got together three thousand dollars, partly through her savings, partly through a small legacy. Her object had been to apply the money to the medical education of her only brother, to whom she had been both mentor and sister from his early years, both being orphans. He had, however, gratefully declined the generosity in his behalf, and was already pursuing his studies with money saved from his own industry, unknown to her."

"Miss Eggleston mentioned these facts to her distinguished visitors, and was also imprudent enough to say that she kept her little fortune under lock and key in her own house, instead of intrusting it to the custody of a bank."

"Her visitors, especially the elegant silver mine president, were very agreeable. Of course, the amount at her disposal was a mere bagatelle. But he professed to be greatly interested in the young lady's history, and even condescended to unfold the advantages of the Zorilla."

"Miss Eggleston, though not very world-wise, is a young woman of sound sense. She listened calmly to everything expatiated on, turned the matter over in her mind, and decided not to invest."

"Her visitors took their departure. Miss Eggleston remembered when too late that she had imprudently mentioned some particulars as to the secret whereabouts of her three thousand dollars. But, in view of these seemingly high and important character of her chief visitor, she did not deem it wise to give herself any special concern on that account."

"Nevertheless, President Fullhand had sunk his pocket money that very day through laying wagers on the defeated team. Perhaps it was inconvenient for him to await fresh remittances from the Zorilla coffers. At all events, he was hard up, and the hiding-place of Miss Eggleston's money was known to him."

"That same night her cottage was broken into, and the three thousand dollars disappeared. So did the elegant Fullhand and his fiery-haired satellite of the bewildering aliases."

"Some few traces of the thieves, however, were not wanting. Miss Eggleston brought them to New York with her, and laid them before me, with the request that I would undertake to recover her money and bring the criminals to justice."

"I did so the more readily from the fact of my having long had my eye on Fullhand, in connection with other and yet graver suspicions."

"That is all. If you will listen to me, Mrs. Moore, you will therefore the more fully comprehend your daughter's peril. The man is an adventurer from away back, and is—has been for years, in fact—a married man."

"It is false!" almost screamed Mrs. Moore. "You slander a worthy and reputable gentleman most infamously, sir."

"I speak but the truth, ma'm. And the man's wife is likewise a confederate in all his rascalities—an unscrupulous adventurer, like himself."

"I will not believe it! Quit my house, both of you! This is unbearable."

Steps had been passing and skirts rustling in the neighboring passage throughout the interview, and now two of Mrs. Moore's lady boarders made bold to enter and occupy one corner

of the reception-room, which was large and elegantly appointed.

One of these was a large, distinguished-looking lady, of middle-age, superbly dressed, and with a particularly fine head of bright yellow hair, artistically arranged.

The detective uttered a slight exclamation, and then politely approached this lady.

"Why, Mrs. Fullhand, can it be you?" he said, with his best smile. "This is an unexpected pleasure!"

CHAPTER IX.

STILL ANOTHER UNEXPECTED PLEASURE.

THE boarding house mistress had started and paled, with a bewildered expression, while Paul Eggleston's eyes had opened yet wider, as if wondering if there would ever be an end to the surprises put forth by his detective friend.

As for the lady addressed in this startling fashion by Falconbridge, she simply stared at him, with a half-puzzled, half-supercilious look.

"Sir, you mistake," she replied most icily. "At all events, the name by which you presume to address me is not mine."

The woman's companion—a much younger lady, of evident refinement—suddenly excused herself at this juncture in a low and surprised voice, and quitted the room, not, however, without throwing a distrustful glance, first at the woman addressed and then at Mrs. Moore.

The detective laughed, and straightway altered his manner to a brisk and business-like self-assurance.

"Old Falcon, the detective, ma'm, is seldom, if ever, mistaken in a personality," he said. "Least of all should his mystification be attempted by Blonde Florine, the old-time confederate and sometime reputed wife of Monty Fullhand, the adventurer."

For a flashing instant the woman's composed comeliness was disfigured by an expression of positive fiendishness, but it was gone almost as electrically as it had appeared.

She looked amusedly at the detective through her gold-bowed eye-glasses, and then turned, with elevated eyebrows and a scarcely perceptible shrug of her shapely shoulders, to Mrs. Moore.

"Really, ma'm, your friend is more eccentric than polite!" she drawled. "Whom does he refer to, pray, and why has he taken the liberty to address me?"

"I feel humiliated by this creature's behavior, Mrs. Vavassour," replied the boarding-house mistress, indignantly. "He is no friend of mine, and I had insisted on being relieved of his objectionable presence, together with that of his companion, before you entered the room."

"Vavassour is a good name—a decidedly good name!" observed the detective, with a parting bow that comprehended both ladies, and was imitated by Paul, who had stepped to his side. "Mrs. Moore, my farewell compliments, and I wish you joy of such a distinguished guest as Mrs. Full—I beg her pardon—Madame Vavassour!"

And he gave the latter a parting glance from those terrible eyes of his, as he made his exit, accompanied by Eggleston.

"What sort of man are you, anyway?" demanded the latter when they were in the open air.

"A professional detective," was the smiling response.

"I am dumfounded."

"Nevertheless, you have conducted yourself with admirable discretion, my young friend. I shall know how to trust you in the future."

"Thanks! But, good gracious!"

"An effeminate form of profanity, my boy. Swear roundly, or not at all."

"But I am utterly surprised, Maje! That Madame Vavassour has been boarding there for weeks, and was that high-toned and exclusive that she wouldn't even look at Fullhand, for all of his money and extra style."

"Blonde Florine is not one to disregard instructions, doubtless thoroughly understood beforehand."

"But even Nettie had come to be impressed by the woman."

"A part of the plot."

"Good Lord! do you suppose it was part of that plausible villain's plan to get Nettie in his power?"

"Yes; but fear not for her. Unless I greatly mistake her character, the young lady has native force and wit enough to look out for herself until we can effect her deliverance."

"And my own sister!" burst out Paul afresh, after a wondering pause. "What! you have been following up that scoundrel all along, in her interest, without my so much as suspecting it?"

"It looks a little that way. But didn't I tell you I would open your eyes?"

"Well, you've kept your word, with a vengeance! But I'll call Silla to an account when next I see her."

"Talk of an angel, and you hear the rustle of her wings. Lo, an appearance!"

And Short-Stop Maje was already gayly lifting his hat to a handsome and stylish young woman, just turning an adjoining street-corner, under the escort of Mr. Christopher Payne, who

seemed to be fairly scintillating with happiness under the occasional glance of her bright but thoughtful eyes.

Paul gave a delighted exclamation, and darted forward to greet his sister, who responded to his brotherly kiss in the prettiest fashion conceivable, after which she shook hands with Falconbridge with a cordiality that made Payne a little jealous.

"I wasn't aware that you knew Paul's sister," said Chris, as he joined the detective in walking some little distance behind the brother and sister.

"Oh, yes; Miss Eggleston and I are good friends, Chris."

"But on the occasions when she has visited Eggleston at the college here, you have not appeared as even an acquaintance."

"No, not openly."

And then the detective laughed slyly at the other's jealous stare.

"But be easy, my young friend," he was generous enough to continue. "Even Paul himself did not suspect my acquaintance with Miss Eggleston till this morning."

"Oh, indeed! What a secret it must have been!"

"Necessarily. The young lady does me the honor to employ me professionally. You have doubtless heard of the robbery she once sustained. That is the business."

"Oh! Now, Falconbridge, it's really good of a man like you making such an explanation to a harum-scarum young chap like me."

"Don't mention it, my boy."

"You see, I'm on sort of delicate ground, Short-Stop."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes. I am dead, tee-totally and head-over-ears in love with Drusilla Eggleston, and yet, somehow or other, she will never take me seriously."

"And yet she seems a rather seriously-inclined young lady."

"With every one but me, yes. But she just won't take anything I say, no matter how tender or suggestive, in sober earnest."

"That's bad—for you."

Chris seemed greatly in want of confidential sympathy and advisement.

"What fault, now, do you suppose she can find with me, Maje?"

"How should I know?"

"But you are so much my senior, and must have had no end of experience. Am I a little too lively and jovial and careless, think you?"

"Well, you're neither an ascetic nor a hypochondriac, that's certain."

"Don't laugh at me, there's a good fellow, Maje."

"I'm as solemn as an owl."

"Maybe it's because I'm rich, or will be when my father dies. But then, even such a paragon of beauty, wisdom and all the virtues as Miss Drusilla is, should hardly find fault with a fair-to-middling-appearing chap on that account, I should say."

"Hardly."

"Might it be that she's heard—perhaps from Paul; some fellows tell their sisters everything, I am told—that I occasionally get too full of beer?"

"There's a good deal of charity for the Gambrianian indulgence nowadays, among the liberally disposed, and I have never thought Miss Eggleston particularly strait-laced in her views."

"Ob, blast it all, Short-Stop! what a wintry counselor you are! Can't you help a fellow out, especially when you see how I am suffering?"

The detective laughed.

"You are not suffering—you only imagine you are."

"I swear I am suffering, and with love for Miss Eggleston as my complaint! There, now! Can't you help me out as to the cause of her persisting in treating me as a mere boy?"

"Haven't you just made the explanation—or a possible explanation—in your own words?"

"What do you mean?"

"How old are you, my boy?"

"Well," with a nervous little laugh, "I am not getting gray yet."

"What is your age?"

"Not much of any just yet," very faintly. "That is, I am not quite twenty-one."

"While Miss Eggleston is doubtless five years older than her brother, who is twenty-two."

Chris at once began to rave about the insignificance of a trifling disparity of years in cases of true love, and continued in the same strain till Short-Stop sent him across the way on an errand of inquiry at the office of the Owensburg *Trumpet*, with respect to the published challenge of the college nine.

Miss Eggleston had turned, and now waited for the detective to come up.

"Paul has been reading me a lecture on the sin of secrecy in business affairs, Mr. Falconbridge," she said.

"You seem to have held your own, though, Miss Eggleston."

"I shall call on you this afternoon, if you will be disengaged," continued the young lady, with much seriousness.

The detective mentioned an hour that was

satisfactory, and returned to his room at the hotel.

In the middle of the afternoon, somewhat in advance of the appointed hour, a servant notified him that a lady was desirous of speaking with him.

Not doubting that it was Miss Eggleston, he told the servant to show the visitor into the little apartment where he was writing, and which was both his private office and sitting-room.

But the lady who entered a moment later, closing the door behind her, besides being closely veiled, was of a portlier figure than the visitor he had expected.

"Ah, it is you?" said the detective, quietly, as she composedly seated herself, and, raising her veil, betrayed the features of Madame Vavassour. "Well, I can't say that your visit is wholly unlooked for, Florine."

"I should say not," responded the lady, with much decision of manner. "Old Falcon, it is indispensable that you and I should come to some sort of an understanding."

CHAPTER X.

TWO WOMEN.

It was evident that Madame Vavassour, as she chose to call herself, was laboring under a good-deal of suppressed excitement, though she managed to maintain the statuesque composure that was in keeping with her attractions, which were by no means few, though the possessor was no longer young.

The detective smiled.

"You are perhaps on the right 'lay' this time, Florine," he said, coldly. "When understandings are indispensable, they should not be postponed—if not wholly unattainable."

"I trust that the one I seek will not be adjudged so."

"What do you want?"

"An armistice."

There was an ill-concealed anxiety in her voice.

The detective knitted his brows.

"What good will it do you?" he said, after a slight pause. "There's no trusting a woman like you."

"There is, I swear it, Falconbridge. You can trust me now."

"How far?"

"Well, to keep out of mischief."

He shook his head.

"Don't be so hard on me!" It looked odd, this elegantly dressed, in many respects nobly-demeaned woman pleading thus humbly to such an unassuming and, save for his eyes, rather common-appearing man. "You don't blame me, I hope, for trying to face it out this morning, out of common self-preservation?"

"No, no; immaterial one way or the other."

"Why, then, did you seek to unmask me?" Her lip quivered.

"It was necessary, in order to show up Fullhand, though the lesson seemed lost enough on that ridiculous boarding-house keeper. But enough of this," with his characteristic gesture. "What are you begging for mercy of me for in particular just now?"

"I want to remain where I am, respected and trusted. The air agrees with me."

"I have no doubt you find it preferable to the last prison-cell you occupied."

The woman bit her lip, and there was a passing flash of the terrible look in her face that has once been alluded to.

"You are inexorable—cruel!" she said, in a low voice. "Time was, too, when you were glad enough to trust me."

"Granted. You were a capital detective's spy once, and might have made your mark, but for your taking up with that bound Fullhand, and then backsliding with a rush."

"Falconbridge, help me back to where I was. Monty treats me like a dog, and I want to quit him."

"Rats!"

"I swear to you it's true! I have come to hate him and his service."

"To the extent of working against him, even to his ruin, as I direct?"

"Yes." But this was only answered after a pause, which was enough to vitiate it with the detective.

"It won't do!" said he, again shaking his head. "Out and away you go, Florine!"

"You won't trust me?"

"About as far as I can swing an elephant by the tail."

"Prove me!"

"Good, then! How was Miss Nettie's abduction effected?"

"I presume by chloroform, though I don't know. I was as much astonished as you could have been. Monty's original plan was to woo and marry the girl with my consent, there being big money somehow behind it."

"Then you were not his confidante in the trick of violently carrying her off?"

"Why, of course not!" was the answer, with seemingly truthful vehemence. "I wouldn't have been such a fool. Slave as he has made of me, I would have known that, with the girl's youth and beauty, it would mean the snapping of the last tie by which I held him."

"Why was abduction resorted to?"

"I presume because of Monty's despairing of obtaining her in any other way."

"So he now seeks to compromise her into marrying her?"

"It must be that. However, he'll have his hands full. Besides detesting him like poison, the girl has will, spirit and shrewdness of her own."

"Where would he hide and imprison her away?"

"How should I know? Good God, major! I wish I did," and Florine ground her teeth.

"Shall you be able to find out for me?"

"Undoubtedly; sooner or later."

"Do so within a week from to-day, at furthest. Otherwise I'll pulverize you to the earth. If I have your promise to that effect, you are free to Vavassour it till then."

"You have my promise, and I will keep it," she arose. "Now you see, sir—"

"Not a word more!" he peremptorily opened the door for her. "Quick! I am expecting another visitor—a lady this time."

Without another word, she revealed her face, and swept out of view, trembling with suppressed rage—like an humiliated queen at the command of a clown.

"Bah!" muttered the detective, setting aside the chair in which she had sat, and putting another in its place. "It is almost a sacrilege to receive Drusilla in the same room whose atmosphere that creature has enjoyed. But I suppose it can't be helped."

A few minutes later, Miss Eggleston appeared. The detective's eyes brightened and softened with his greeting of the new visitor, and he made her comfortable with a careful and anxious painstaking of which perhaps he himself was unconscious.

Drusilla was, indeed, a woman of a different order from that of her predecessor in Short-Stop's visiting chair.

In addition to her noble comeliness, quiet power, force of character and decision of resolve were expressed in every lineament and line—an American self-made young lady, independent, modest, forceful, attractive.

Her dark eyes and bright, mobile features were now illuminated, as if with a fresh-formed purpose.

"No need to ask, sir, how you are progressing with my affair," she began, smiling. "Paul has given me all the news."

"By which you must know that I am not progressing with your affair."

"I can afford to await your own good time, Mr. Old Falcon."

"Kind of you to say so."

"No, only just. Besides, I am rather proud of my little charge against Fullhand being fatefully mixed up with others so much more momentous."

"It is fateful, Miss Eggleston. However, the success shall be lumped, no less than the accusations."

"I have a proposition to make."

"I have read as much in your face and eyes, if you will excuse my saying so."

"Don't mention it."

"What is your proposition, miss?"

"First, you must know that I have given up my private school."

"Ah! to go upon the stage?"

"Yes—ultimately. How bright you are, by the way!" with a delicious little laugh. "Persons aren't often so penetrative—that is, men aren't. I have long studied, theoretically and amateurly, as you know, and am at last to have a chance with a New York manager (think of that!) in November."

"I congratulate you!"

"You don't say so very enthusiastically."

The detective narrowly escaped flushing outright.

"I can't help a distaste of the thought of your going on the stage," he admitted.

Here there was a tattoo of raps on the door, and Paul Eggleston, without waiting to be bidden, thrust his head in to announce that the College Nine's challenge had been formally accepted by the Cherry Valley team, at whatever stakes should be agreed on, for the day after the morrow.

And with that he hurried away, to whoop up the news among the rest of the "boys."

"Paul can be enthusiastic, if I can't," observed the detective, smiling.

"Who couldn't be, over the National Game?" cried Drusilla. "And here is my proposition to the front at once."

"But what is it?"

"To accompany the College Nine as a lady admirer, while waiting for my New York engagement. You never saw a specimen of my character-acting, did you?"

"No."

Miss Eggleston laughed. Then, after a glance through the half-open door of an adjoining small dressing-room, she suddenly sprung up and disappeared into it.

While Short-Stop was still wondering at her object, there came another rap on the hall-door.

"If you please, sor," said a fresh-looking Irish servant-girl, putting in an appearance, "the mather says are yez engaged?"

CHAPTER XI.

DRUSILLA.

"I am engaged," replied the detective, little pleased at the intrusion.

"Av you plaze, sor," continued the girl, "the mather will be sorry to know, for there's a broth of a Dutch boy as is howlin' mad to see yez."

"A Dutch boy!" Short-Stop looked up in surprise. "I know nothing of any Dutch boy. However," impatiently, "tell Mr. Barker that I am not to be disturbed on any account at present."

"Yes, sor; glory to your Honor!"

"An odd importation, that girl!" reflected Short-Stop, as the girl disappeared. "Must be a brand new operative in the chambermaid line.—However, I wonder what Miss Eggleston can be up to in my little dressing-room yonder! A pearl of bright women, though! By Jupiter! if I were but a younger man, or in some other business, or had nest-egged a little more money, or—"

He abruptly interrupted his wandering thoughts to fix his eyes again, with puzzled curiosity, on the closed door by which the young lady had disappeared.

Here there was another summons from the hall-passage, and then one of the most preposterously fat Dutch boys imaginable, with blubber cheeks, pop-eyes, and looking the incarnation of sausage and sourcrot, came blundering into the room.

"Ish dis de dedecive?" he puffed out. "Vere ish dot dedecive? Un tief go owid away mid dat silfer watch of mine, unt I vant dot dedecive to arrest unt hang der loafer all der dime."

Short-Stop, in a fit of rage at the intrusion, sprung up and caught the lad by the collar.

"What do you mean by forcing your lubberly, greasy carcass upon my privacy in this way?" he roared, shaking him roughly. "Didn't I send word to Mr. Barker that I wouldn't see you under any circumstances? Would you mistake my quarters for a Bremen sausage shop, and myself for your grandmother? What do you mean by it, you herring-eating Dutch blunderhead?"

But at this juncture the frightened intruder broke away from his grasp, and incontinently took to flight, while the angry detective slammed the door to with a sounding bang.

"What can Landlord Billy Barker mean by having me intruded on in this way?" he growled under his breath, while pacing the floor. "It is an outrage! And what can Miss Eggleston think of all this rumpus going on in here? However—"

He again fastened his eyes inquiringly on the dressing-room door, his mystification at the young lady's retirement by this time almost passing bounds.

But here again there was a rap, this time a very gentlemanly rap, for admittance from the hall.

Doubting not that it was Uncle Billy come to apologize, the detective, still in an ill-humor, strode to the door and opened it.

But he was confronted by a very dudish little young gentleman, with sport and gambler written all over him.

"What do you want, sir?" demanded Short-Stop, angrily.

"A tip, my deah boy, as to the College Nine, you know," was the drawled response.

"You can't get it here!"

And the detective was about to shut the door in the fellow's face when the new-comer laid his hand persuasively on his arm.

"Don't do anything rash, you know, my deah boy," pleaded the little fellow. "I'm connected with the St. Louis Flyers, you must know, and I'm looking around for new available base-ball stock through the rural districts. The performance of you Owensburg chaps has been mentioned highly in my hearing; and, as I hear it bruited abroad that your nine's challenge has been accepted by the Cherry Valley team, why—"

"Inquire of Paul Eggleston. He's our pitcher, and is up to snuff. Lives or lodges next door."

A minute or two after the dudish sport had been disposed of, the door of the dressing-room opened, and Miss Eggleston reappeared.

"What a time you have been having in here!" she said, smiling.

"I should say so."

"But, don't you think you treated your visitors with unnecessary brusqueness?"

Short-Stop gave a forced laugh.

"Doubtless more unceremoniously than had you deigned to remain with me," he replied. "But, what can you know, let me ask, of my intruders and my way of treating them?"

A startling transformation came over the young lady. Even without the air of characteristic costume, her face suddenly took on the exact image and expression of the fresh colleen who had first intruded upon Short-Stop's meditations.

"Arrah! an' would yez be axin' such a question av meself?" she exclaimed, with a precise imitation of brogue, eye-twinkle, shrinking coyness, and all. "Then it's no better than the Dootch boy himself ye are, an' so I shall tell the mather!"

Then there was yet another transformation no less surprising.

The young lady's face became that of the Dutch boy himself, not forgetting the puffy fullness of the cheeks, the pop-eyed gaze, the stupidity of expression, and the rest.

"Meester Dedecive, I have lost my vatch unt chain. Gome unt hang dot loafer py der neck vot sdole mine broppurty. Gome ride oud, unt I gif you balluf a tollar all de dime."

Then, with another flashing change, it was—so far as the reproduction of voice and facial lineaments was concerned—it was the dapper little dude-gambler that stood before the bewildered detective.

"Come, now, you know, just one tip, old fel-lab, as to what you Owensburg chaps can do on the diamond, you know!" drawled the last remembered voice. "I really cawn't take it second-hand, you know. Just a little tip, my deah boy, and it may be a mascot in your little pawcket, you know!"

Then she ended, with a happy laugh at his amazed appearance, and was instantly her sweet, attractive self once more.

"Well, how will I do?" cried Drusilla, gayly. "Now that you have had some improvised examples, how do you think I might succeed at character-acting?"

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Short-Stop. "I must realize it all first."

"But, there was nothing real about it—all make-believe."

"Yes, yes; of course. But"—he suddenly turned upon her—"how *did* you manage it?"

"What! you were really deceived?"

"Who wouldn't have been? Good Lord! it was simply immense!"

"Thank you! The explanation is simple. You must have wondered at my liberty with your dressing-room here." She blushed.

"Liberty! Don't call it that."

"Well, I guessed that a number of make-ups would be among a detective's outfit, my investigation justified the assumption, and there is a door communicating with the hall-passage from that room also. There you are!"

"Bless me! and you fairly hoodwinked me with my own properties—my sinews of war, so to speak!"

"So it seemed. Are you mad?"

"Perfectly ferocious, to say nothing of my sense of humiliation, which is becomingly abject, I assure you!"

Drusilla laughed musically—and, considering her thoughtful, serious twenty-six years, she had a singularly rippling, girlish laugh. It was like a peal of joy-bells.

"Well, you think I will do, then?"

"Most emphatically! The so-called lightning-change artists would have no show alongside of you on the stage."

"But I mean as in your own line—something of a detective's assistant on a lase-balling tour, such as your nine have projected?"

"The dickens! how is that?"

"Well, Mr. Falconbridge—or Short-Stop Maje, as I suppose I might as well begin addressing you—that is just my proposition, in a nutshell."

"Bless me! I hadn't thought of *that*."

"But I had, you see. What do you think of it?"

"Let me consider. You would go right along with us?"

"Of course, and under Paul's immediate escort; and then assume such various characters for mingling with the spectators, especially with the betting-rings, as should suggest themselves."

"Humph!"

"Do you approve of it?"

"You would have rude associations, and not infrequently at that."

"That is my lookout. Do you approve of it?"

"I—I hate to think of you undertaking anything—anything *outré*."

"I shall naturally shirk any suggestion of indecacy. Your opinion, if you please."

And the pretty foot under the dress-skirt began tapping the floor a little impatiently.

"I fear you would soon sicken of the undertaking."

"I am in the habit of carrying through what I attempt."

"No need to tell me that."

"Do you approve, or do you not?"

"I consent, anyway."

Miss Eggleston clapped her hands.

"Say that you do so unqualifiedly!" she cried.

"Yes, then."

She sprung to her feet.

"It is settled then!" she exclaimed joyously.

"I am to have my own part in tracking down our master villain, and in rescuing the Belle of Owensburg."

Here Paul again interrupted them.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE DIAMOND FIELD.

"Big news!" cried the pitcher of the college team, making his appearance, heated and out of breath, but correspondingly happy.

"Let us have it," said the detective.

"By all means!" supplemented Miss Eggle

ston radiantly. "I'm to be one of you—in my own way."

"Good enough!" assented her brother, who had already reluctantly given in his adhesion to her project. "Well, the representative of the Cherry Valleys is already here, impatient to confer with you, Short-Stop, as our captain."

"I am ready for him," was Short-Stop's reply, and Miss Eggleston rose to go.

"There's better news than that," interposed Paul.

"What is it?" demanded Drusilla, with mock impatience. "Don't you see I am pressed for time, in order to make ready for the tower?"

"There's to be a lot of betting men present from an adjoining county fair, Mr. Fullhand among them."

The young lady's face lighted up, and then became as set and stern as its prettiness would admit of.

"So; nothing could be better," she said, compressing her rosy lips. "Fate yields our prey to our hands at the outset of our career. *Mes camarades au champ d'armes, au revoir,*" and with a parting laugh, she bustled away.

"Where is Cherry Valley?" asked Short-Stop.

"Fifty miles due east by railroad," was Eggleston's reply.

"That much nearer New York City! So much the better."

"There is a sort of preparatory academy there, it seems, and it is a team from among its students that challenges ours."

"Good! Do they want the match to be for money?"

"For a purse, or our traveling expenses, as you shall prefer."

"Let it be solely for the latter, then. We are not gamblers, and shall not begin by posing as such. Where is the Cherry Valleys' representative?"

"Chris Payne was to bring him here in half an hour. I hear them coming up-stairs now."

A moment later the representative of the rival team was introduced to Short-Stop Maje, and the result was that the match game was forthwith arranged to take place at Cherry Valley on the next afternoon following.

When that time arrived the Owensburgers were duly on hand, having made the trip by a mid-morning train, and completed their personal preparations for an extensive tour.

A hitch was threatened at the outset in the choice of an umpire, the Cherry Valleys—having doubtless been manipulated beforehand—backed by a gang of country sports from the neighboring fair-grounds, at once putting forth Mr. Bricks, alias Curveshot Balder, et al., as their choice for an impartial man, with a good deal of insistence, and his appointment being no less vigorously opposed by the Owensburgers.

It was a sort of country-side gala day, the grounds were crowded with spectators, more or less interested, and the dispute speedily waxed warm.

"What's your objection to Bricksy, any way?" at last roared out the captain of the Cherry Valleys, a powerfully-built, hot-headed young fellow, known as Wrestling Pete, from his unrivaled success in the palestinian contests of the academy and the country round about. "He's famous all over the country as a base-ball umpire."

"That's our objection exactly," returned Short-Stop, who was naturally leading his side in the controversy, though in his ordinarily modest, unassuming way. "He's a little too famous for us."

"But what's your special objection, young feller?"

"I sha'n't go into particulars. We have reason to mistrust him, that's all."

"But that ain't enough."

"I think it is. We'll willingly accept as umpire any good, honest man from among your own townsmen who understands the game thoroughly."

Bricks, who had been drinking enough to be both ugly and reckless, and was, moreover, conscious of almost unanimous support from the rough sporting element present, to say nothing of the academicians themselves, here burst out angrily from a half-ruffianly coterie of which he seemed to be a leading spirit.

"That's as good as sayin' I'm not an honest man!" he shouted. "Eh? Is that it?"

"Take it as you please, young man, but be careful to thunder mildly in a clear sky," was Short-Stop's quiet response. "Electricity is sometimes catching."

Unfortunately for him, Bricks had not witnessed the detective's summary disposal of Tom Briggs's pugilistic aspirations on the former occasion, and his fellow gamblers, moreover, now began to guy him a bit.

One word led to another, until finally some one shouted over Short-Stop's head:

"A white horse for that red head to prance on! and then he'll have his mascot."

It was the last feather on the camel's back of Curveshot Balder's discretion.

Lowering his head, with his great red-and-freckled fists doubled, and fairly gnashing his teeth, he suddenly rushed upon the Diamond-Field Detective like a mad bull.

The attack was wholly a surprise for Short-Stop, who had not dreamed of anticipating it.

Carried off his feet by the ruffian's initial onset, he was tossed into the air and to one side, like a straw in a hurricane, though alighting on his feet with the agility of a cat.

Emboldened to frenzy by his apparently easy success, Bricks charged again, this time with a bellowing, chaw-'em-all-up sort of a roar.

Thirty seconds thereafter he was lying on the ground, bleeding at the nose, half his false teeth in his throat, badly bunged up, and a thoroughly whipped man generally.

Short-Stop hadn't even rolled up his sleeves to accomplish the bully's defeat, which had gone on with the ease and efficacy of greased lightning.

"I really hope we'll now be able to settle on some decent man for an umpire," he quietly remarked, while the fallen ruffian was being assisted to a neighboring pump by some of his pals.

"Fighting isn't base-ball, and is, moreover, distasteful to my feelings."

At the same time he signed to a slender young gentleman, with what might be called a National Game mustache (nine on a side), and the latter strolled off after Balder and his coterie.

"That's all right!" cried Wrestling Pete, of the Cherry Valleys, with a rasping laugh; "especially when you're a fisticuff sharp, and have it all your own way."

"I don't exactly take you, my friend," continued Short-Stop, even more unassumingly than before.

"I mean to say that some folks's science is altogether with their fists." And the muscular Cherry Valleyan looked with a sneer at the detective's comparatively insignificant framework.

"Oh! and in what direction may your own science lie, my friend?"

Wrestling Pete planted his feet firmly, standing up supply and yet firmly from the ground like a man of steel, and spat on his brawny hands suggestively.

"I'm a wrestler!" he announced, with a broad grin.

"Toss him over your shoulder, Pete!"

"Crack his ribs!"

"Give him a grand and lofty!"

"You kin do it, Pete, if any man in York State kin!"

These were specimens of the encouraging shouts from among the wrestling champion's associates and their backers.

Short-Stop's little party were, on the contrary, correspondingly depressed, since it was generally feared that the leader's palestinian skill might be but little the adjunct of his pugilistic prowess, though his behavior should have reassured them on the spot.

"Oh!" he responded, with his quiet, good-natured little laugh; "as it is still in the shank of the afternoon, I don't mind trying a friendly fall or two with you, my friend."

Wrestling Pete's grin gave place to an alert, business-like expression, very much as a horn war-horse might exchange his placid pasture demeanor for the fiery, watchful, eager and proud air when clothing his neck with thunder and snuffing the battle from afar off.

Off went his striped sporting cap, and then he was crouched in the half-squatty, frog-like fashion, head forward, hands on knees, after the approved formula of the wrestling ring.

Short-Stop, however, seemed to make no preliminary preparation whatever, but merely maintained an erect, rather awkward attitude, a feeble, apparently half-scared smile on his lips, his hands hanging listlessly at his sides.

"What shall it be?" shouted Wrestling Pete.

"Catch-as-catch-can?"

"Oh, yes!" was the hesitating reply; "almost anything will suit me, I suppose."

"Ready?"

"Ready!"

"Now?"

"Now!"

The champion bounded forward, seized his smaller antagonist with the rapidity of a blue streak, and, whirling him up in the air, seemingly as unresistingly as a doll, hurled him back out and downward with the force of a quadrupled steam-power thrashing-machine.

To every one's astonishment, however, the detective floated away as if made of thistle-down, and then, alighting upon one toe, spun around like a top, after which he calmly awaited the champion's next effort.

Again and again were similar essays made, but with no better success.

Then there was a sudden and twinkling writhing together of the wrestling forms, ending in quite a genuine surprise to all parties concerned, solely excepting, perhaps, Short-Stop himself.

The champion of Cherry Valley had been stood on his head.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INNINGS.

WRESTLING PETE slowly arose from the recumbent posture he had been so unexpectedly forced to assume, looking rather ruefully, and picked the sand and grass out of his ears in a somewhat crestfallen way.

"That was all an accident," said he at last. "It mightn't occur again in a thousand years."

"Likely enough," admitted Short-Stop, almost apologetically. "Shall we try another?"

But another, and yet another, fall was tried, and with no better result for the Cherry Valley champion.

He was not a bad fellow, and at last freely admitted himself worsted; a satisfactory umpire was chosen, and the match-game proceeded without further difficulty.

It is not the purpose to give anything like a detailed account of the ball-playing incidental to this work.

The game under consideration was at a very critical stage, with honors about even, when a great riot suddenly arose among the rougher elements of the spectators, and it at length became apparent that a project was on foot to break up the game, or have it decided against the visiting team.

Short-Stop was at the bat at the time.

He had just sent a sky-scraper when a brick flew at his head, and then the riot was at its height.

He, however, kept his men solidly at their work, in spite of the personal danger to all; the Cherry Valleys were no less firm in their discipline, and the decisive innings terminated at last with a hard-earned victory for the Owensburgers.

"Follow me!" shouted Short-Stop, as soon as the decision was announced. "These ruffians are looking for fight—we'll let them have it!"

With that he led his nine, followed by several lovers of fair play from among the defeated team, straight into the heart of the disturbance, and instantly the free fight became a general one.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Paul Eggleston at Short-Stop's ear; "where can Drusilla be?"

At this very instant they both espied her—she was in the character of the slender young gentleman, with the base-ball mustache, already referred to—in the midst of a roaring, pushing, jostling, turbulent group, composed of Curveshot Balder and his immediate ilk, but having for its leading spirit a colossus of a bawling, blaspheming scoundrel, with fists like trip-hammers and a general formidableness of aspect suggestive of Front de Bœuf in the Ivanhoe legend.

The disguised young lady was, however, perfectly cool and even laughing, though somewhat pale, and was apparently endeavoring to protect or intercede for the protection of a patriarchal-looking man, in blue-goggle spectacles, who seemed in danger of being badly hustled.

"This is our chance!" growled Short-Stop, in response. "Where our lightning-change artist is, Fullhand cannot be far away, if on the grounds at all."

With that, closely followed by Paul Eggleston and Chris Payne—the latter being also in the secret of Drusilla's identity—he led a wedge-like rush into the bosom of the particularized group, his fists striking right and left after the manner of a two-edged sword.

"Holy Smoke! it's Old Falcon himself!"

The words were those of the blaspheming colossus, whom at the same instant the detective recognized as a dangerous tough and gang-leader from one of the lower New York City wards.

The exclamation was accompanied by a torrent of invective, together with a tremendous counter-rush on the part of the colossus himself.

For an instant the disguised girl, pallid, but collected, was in his path, and his ponderous fist was already poised to strike her down.

But the intended blow never reached its delicate mark. With a long, quick bound, and a half-articulate, teeth-gritting sort of snarl that was terrible to hear, the Diamond-Field Detective was far in advance of his fellows—had torn the girl aside from the ruffian's path—and then the coward blow smote the unresisting air, while his own shoulder-hitting stroke hit cut straight into the jugular, causing the villain to reel.

Paul had caught Drusilla in his arms, while Chris Payne was fighting bravely in front of her, but, for an instant it seemed all up with Short-Stop.

"Never mind me!" gasped the pretended young gentleman. "Keep the spectated old fellow in view. It is of more importance than you can imagine, and Short-Stop can care for himself against any and all odds."

She had not overrated the latter's fighting capacities.

The mob, directly after his dealing the giant the staggering facer, had suddenly closed in upon him like the toppling water-walls over the van of Pharaoh's pursuing host in the Red Sea path of the Exodus.

Fists and clubs seemed to fall upon and around him, like a murderous rain, while shouts and curses filled the air.

But, it was Short-Stop Maje—Old Falcon, the indomitable—who was in the thick of it, and no ordinary bruiser or athlete.

He seemed to hold his peril of no more account than did Cœur de Lion under the bristling

walls of Front de Boeuf's Castle, with Rebecca describing the scene to the wounded knight in the upper chamber, from whose casement she was witnessing the prowess of England's pilgrim king.

The human waves seemed to beat against the Diamond-Field Detective, as against a rock of adamant, and then roll back, split, broken and dissipated.

"Keep at him!" roared the colossus, quickly recovering from his repulse. "Only keep him busy till I can finish him! I tell you, it is Old Falcon himself!"

"Ay, Jake Jeliffe!" came in sharp, hissing response from the invincible detective's compressed lips; "Old Falcon it is, and upon his winning game!"

Jeliffe had suddenly hurled himself upon his wiry antagonist, both brawny fists shooting out simultaneously for the mark.

One of the blows expended itself on the conch of a gambler, knocking him endwise. The other flew over the detective's head, cleverly "ducked" to evade it.

Then zip! bang! flew out the piston-rod punches of the double-handed work from Short-Stop's shoulders, and Mr. Jeliffe was senseless under foot, with a dislocated jaw, both eyes in mourning, and the "Sweet By and By" of dizzy reflections in humming ears.

By this time the remaining members of the college team had rallied to their leader's back, and the contest with the sporting crowd was of a more even character.

Drusilla had been protected from injury, but, as yet, had been unable or unwilling to discommode herself of her perilous surroundings.

She now took advantage of the momentary lull in the fight to spring forward from between her brother and Chris Payne, to the Diamond-Field Detective's side.

"Mark the spectacled old fellow now trying to skulk away," she whispered in his ear. "I am almost sure it is Fullhand in disguise."

The detective was quite sure of it as soon as his eagle eye comprehended the personage indicated, who was now shouldering his way out of the press, attended by Curveshot Balder and two ruffianly-looking men, all of whom seemed to have an anxious regard for his safety.

"Colleagues to the front!" shouted Short-Stop, with the voice of a trumpet. "Yonder's our master-game!"

He accompanied the words with an indicative gesture, and then sprang like a meteor in pursuit.

But the entire gambling contingent were now in rout, streaming in between him and the smaller retreating group.

The latter were speedily lost sight of, and five minutes later, the whistle of a departing train was heard, by which it became pretty evident that Fullhand had effected his evanishment in security.

The game was decided, the riot was at an end, and now, with the best of restored good feelings, the defeated academicians were only anxious to be hospitable to the victors.

"You are the boss amateurs of York State counties, sure," exclaimed Wrestling Pete, as the mouthpiece of his party. "At playing or fighting, you boys haven't your equals, there's no mistake about it. We've got the money ready for your traveling expenses, as agreed; and now nothing will content us but you be our guests at a little spread we have got up for you."

There was no discounting this sort of talk and spirit, and the festivities were accepted in the kindness in which they were offered.

Toward the close of the supper that wound up the affair in the Academy dining-hall, a prepossessing gentleman of singularly courtly bearing and agreeable address, who seemed to be an outsider guest, so to speak, approached Short-Stop, where the latter was chatting gayly with Miss Eggleston, who was present in her charming, true character, with but few the wiser for her having assumed any other.

CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

THE stranger introduced himself as Mr. Barfield—Mr. Gideon Barfield—said a few words as to the causes of his having witnessed the game, congratulated Short-Stop on the fine playing of his team, was introduced to Miss Eggleston and others, and was presently in agreeable talk.

"It is rather unusual to see a lady with a team," observed Mr. Barfield to Drusilla, after some general remarks. "But I am sure it is a praiseworthy innovation, that might be generally practiced with advantage."

Miss Eggleston laughed, and explained her presence with the traveling team as her brother's special companion; and then engaged in talk with some ladies to whom she had been introduced.

But the suave Mr. Barfield, even while chatting with Short-Stop and others, followed the young lady so persistently with his respectfully admiring eyes, that Chris Payne's secret jealousy was not long in being kindled, though he managed to keep it to himself.

It soon became generally known that Mr. Barfield was a gentleman of wealth and leisure,

with an amateurish passion for the national game, though nothing of a bettor, and he became generally liked.

"I have a country place at Hudson City, where they have an excellent local team," was a bit of information that he at last volunteered. "I shouldn't wonder if you could be accommodated with a match there, if agreeable."

"That is the sport we are looking for," returned Short-Stop, and he handed him a copy of the standing challenge in the *Trumpet*.

Mr. Barfield looked over the article, and at last engaged the team outright to accompany him to Hudson City on the following day.

"I am quite sure I can arrange a match for you on favorable terms," said he. "And I wish you would consent to be my guests while there—to remain till you are tired of the place, for that matter."

"The offer was made in such a cordial and unassuming manner that it was accepted on the spot; and then Mr. Barfield found occasion once more to converse with Miss Eggleston.

"You are doubtless also an enthusiast in baseball?" he asked.

"Not particularly so," she replied. "But I shall surely enjoy the tour with my brother and his associates, all of whom are personal friends of mine."

"Ah! very pleasant undoubtedly. You witnessed the fine playing of to-day."

"Yes."

"But I did not notice you among the other lady spectators."

"There were so many of them, though—that is, till the disgraceful rioting drove them from the grounds."

"True. By the way, Miss Eggleston, the rioting itself was rather unique."

"In what way?"

"Well, I remarked among the participants a certain slender young gentleman with a light mustache—in fact, a very light mustache—who seemed to make the affair rather unique, at least to me. Perhaps you also noticed him."

This was accompanied by a glance, in which there was the ghost of an amused smile that caused Drusilla to more than fear that the secret of her disguise had been penetrated.

However, she had taken a liking to the gentleman, which this alarm did not greatly modify, and, though coloring vividly at the thought, she managed to evade the subject under discussion.

"You doubtless heard my offer to your friends, Miss Eggleston, and its acceptance by them," said he, when wishing her good-evening. "I do trust that you will consider yourself as one of the team," with a smile, "and therefore as being included—nay, specially included—in my invitation. My daughter, who keeps house for me, will be happy to know, and perhaps—love you."

"I shall be pleased to come, sir," she replied simply.

She afterward remembered, however, a strangely soft light in Mr. Barfield's dark eyes while he was saying the words, "and perhaps—love you," after a slight pause in his parting sentence; and she, moreover, could not help wondering that so young, yet grave-appearing a gentleman should have a young lady daughter, as she doubted not the latter must be in point of age from his manner of referring to her.

An hour or two later, after Drusilla had sought her room at the hotel, Mr. Barfield was under discussion by such of the collegian nine as were yet chatting together over their cigars in Short-Stop's apartment.

"Floyd, of the Cherry Valleys, says Mr. Barfield is a capital gentleman—no end of money, free-handed, and with base-ball connoisseurship as his only dissipation," volunteered Paul Eggleston on the subject.

"Wrestling Peters says the same of him," chimed in another. "And how different Mr. Barfield's connoisseurship from the gambling infatuation of that bound Fullhand!"

"I should say so!" cried another. "It's insulting to mention the two names in one breath."

"Oh, maybe not so bad as that!" put in Chris Payne, a little peevishly. "Mr. Barfield, though so elegant and quiet and friendly, and all that, has got to be tested under the rind, like all other men."

"Oh, give us a rest, Chris!" cried First-Base Tompkins, maliciously. "Can't a bang-up stranger look admiringly at Miss Eggleston, without your green-eyed monster rustling to the fore?"

Young Payne's enthusiastic though not very promising passion for Drusilla was a standing mild joke among his associates.

Even Short-Stop joined in the laugh at the catcher's expense, though he had himself marked Mr. Barfield's susceptibility to the young lady's attractions, and not without certain saddening, if not altogether jealous, reflections of his own.

For, if the truth must be told, the detective was somewhat smitten with those charms in the secret depths of his own consciousness, though with the secret resolve of letting them remain there undisturbed to the end.

"I don't care," said Chris, good-naturedly. "If Miss Eggleston must, of necessity, fascinate every new-comer across her conquering path, she

is no more amiable with one than with another, and I notice to-night that she didn't care at all for Mr. Barfield's attentions."

"Of course, she didn't and wouldn't!" interposed Paul, a little sharply. "Besides, Mr. Barfield is of more than middle-age, and a widower, with a daughter keeping house for him at Hudson. Why, the man must be as old as Short-Stop here!"

The detective winced inwardly, with a sense of pain and exasperation that a few weeks before would have been inconceivable to him.

After his associates had retired, there came a last knock at his door, and Paul Eggleston reappeared, accompanied by his sister.

"Ah, I thought you would come!" And Short-Stop set out chairs for both, while addressing Drusilla in particular.

"Yes," replied the latter, in an equally business-like tone. "As you cannot very well travel with your office-room in tow, I nevertheless, knew you would wish to question me as to my part in to-day's stormy proceedings."

As she spoke, she threw a rather pitying glance around, for the room was an exceptionally common-place one, even for a country hotel, and there were already evidences of more than bachelor carelessness in its littering of gaping valises, fragmentary articles of sporting paraphernalia, and the like.

Short-Stop came as near blushing as he was in the habit of doing.

"I never look for first-chop accommodations for myself in traveling," said he, apologetically; "and my bachelor habits are incorrigible, I am afraid."

"Don't mention it," remarked Miss Eggleston, quietly. "Besides, you can look out for other, if not for yourself. The apartment you selected for me is a charming one, and, I doubt not, by long odds the best in the house."

"You ought to get married, Falconbridge," blurted out Paul, with his boyish horse-laugh. "You're hardly too old yet for matrimony, I fancy, old fellow."

The detective gritted his teeth in secret—something he had never done before at an allusion to his years; but Drusilla at once relieved him by elevating her finely penciled eyebrows, and saying, with unaffected surprise:

"Why, how odd of you, Paul, not to say impolite! Major Falconbridge is still quite a young man."

"I am past forty, though," admitted the detective, with truthful abruptness.

Paul burst out laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha! How old does a chap have to be, then, to be called over-ripe, I should like to know. However, I'd be willing to bet that our new patron, Mr. Barfield, is as much as forty, too—I don't mean forty-two, mind you, but forty *pat*—ha, ha, ha!—and, besides being rich and a widower, I have no doubt he considers himself a marrying man yet."

Drusilla bit her lip, and frowned a little, though accustomed to a sisterly indulgence for her brother's occasional unsophistication.

"This is not business," she said, shortly.

"True!" And the detective crossed his legs, and was at once invested with his official air. "How did you first manage with Bricks to-day?"

"Readily enough. In my swell personation, I first cultivated him with an off-hand invitation to drink. It was accepted by a couple of his friends, as well as he. The giant Jeliffe, whom you afterward trounced so soundly and deservedly, was one of them. Bricks was fresh from the pump, though still giddy under the effects of your opening lesson in the manly art. I further won upon him by pretending a world of sympathy for his bruises, while cheapening the prowess that had caused them to the best of my hypocritical ability. In a short time we were fairly on intimate terms. Much of the secret workings of his coarse, cunning nature were revealed to me. However, there wasn't time for him to become as confidential as you could wish, sir; and it was only by an outside accident that I made up to the spectacled old sport, in order to assure myself that he was Fullhand in disguise."

Short-Stop was rubbing his hands softly together, after his professional habit.

"How did that come about?" he inquired.

CHAPTER XV.

EN ROUTE.

MISS EGGLESTON laughed.

"I saw the two together just before the rioting wind-up of the game," she replied. "They were conferring in whispers, and this seemed to me strange, since the men had acted like strangers to one another theretofore, and also by the apparent respectability of the spectacled old fellow, which contrasted Curveshot Balder's style so pronouncedly."

"My suspicions were at once excited that the old gentleman was something other than he assumed to be. I therefore drew nearer, and kept up a sharp watch under an affectation of carelessness."

"Then accident favored me. You remember that sky-scraper that finished its flight among the spectators when Tompkins was making his big dash?"

"Perfectly!"

"Well, the ball brought up in old Mr. Spec-racle's stomach, doubling him up like a jack-knife, and flustering his make-up not a little before he could catch back his lost wind.

"I was instantly on hand to help Bricks bring his companion around, and was so generally sympathetic as to win some words of thanks from the latter, whose disguise I had by this time penetrated.

"Then, the wind-up riot having started, Balder hurried away into the thick of it.

"I pretended much solicitude for the old gentleman's safety. While doing so I endeavored to win something of his confidence, but with only indifferent success.

"There wasn't time, you see. Besides, Full-hand is a much warier rogue than his satellite, as you know.

"Just as I was beginning to hope for some progress with him the wave of the fight overtook and separated us. You know the rest. Before this interruption, however, I obtained one important piece of information from my pseudo patriarchal friend."

"What was that?"

"He admitted himself as a mild enthusiast on the subject of the National Game at large, and, confessing that he was in raptures of admiration over the play of our nine in particular, declared his intention of following them up in the course of their tour."

"Ah, that is worth knowing."

"I was sure you would think so."

"He will doubtless again be an onlooker at Hudson City?"

"Yes; from what he said."

"Think you he imagines himself still secure in his present fictitious character?"

"It would seem so."

"What is your general impression?"

"That Fullhand has already placed Miss Nettie in a secure place of confinement, brief as has been the interval since her abduction; and is now devoting himself to following us up, with the real intention of working your personal destruction or disablement at all hazards."

"Good!" exclaimed the detective, cheerfully. "Miss Eggleston, your inference coincides with mine exactly. Let us now separate. Our only next course is to await the evolution of events."

Before Short-Stop retired for the night, however, he had occasion to step down into the hotel office, to make inquiries as to the route to Hudson City.

He was about returning to his room when a queer little old-mannish boy, with a perky, sporting air, and a suggestion of railroad travel in his dusty costume and tiny grip-sack, stepped into the office, and came to a halt before him with a sort of military salute.

"What, Tommy!" ejaculated the detective, in a pleased tone.

"Mr. Falconbridge," was the reply, in a preposterously deep, growling, R-rolling stage-voice, which was laughable as coming from such a diminutive, narrow-chested source, "in the immortal language of the *Duke's Motto*, 'I am here!'"

"So I perceive."

"As *Spartacus* would remark, 'You have sent for me,' striking a tragic attitude, "'and I am come.' Well, and what then, me sovereign liege?"

"Drop all that! You got my telegram of the other day?"

"I did."

"And made the inquiries ordered?"

"Ay."

"But you telegraphed me no response."

"I thought it safer to report in person, without waiting for commands to that effect."

"It is well. Mr. Landlord, pass over your register, if you please. This is my confidential friend, Mr. Dodd, of New York, and he will want a room directly next to mine."

The proprietor nodded, smiled, and passed over the hotel book, upon which the new arrival gravely inscribed his address, "Thomas Dodd, P. S. A., New York City," in enormous door-plate characters, such as he who runs might read a mile off.

Mr. Dodd then resigned the register to the landlord's inspection, and observed the effect of the fresh signature upon him.

It was less startling than curious.

"Ah, we'll try to make you comfortable, Mr. Dodd. What, may I ask, do the letters P. S. A. stand for?"

"Patriarch of the Shakespearean Amateurs, sir. Sir, I am a representative of the tragic art. Don't be alarmed, however; it is likewise the mimic art."

"Come, Tommy," said the detective, a little impatiently.

"Lights there, ho!" cried Mr. Dodd, tossing his valise and duster to a gaping porter, who had just put in an appearance. "Mr. Falconbridge, I am at your service. Lead on, my liege lord; I follow."

The proprietor and porter exchanged looks of mingled awe and wonder as Mr. Dodd strutted off with a heavy-tragedy stride at Short-Stop's heels.

"Must be one of them actor chaps," observed the former.

The porter was an Irishman.

"Be gob, a June-bug on sbtilts!" was his supplementary comment.

When alone with his master, however, the lad dropped much of his staginess, and was simply the wide-awake, lightning-smart office boy and confidential assistant that he had proved himself by several years' hard service in Old Falcon's employ.

"You made the inquiries at the offices of the Zorilla Company?" demanded the detective.

"Yes, sir."

"Without your object being suspected?"

"Yes, sir."

"Of course the president, Mr. Fullhand, is not on duty now?"

"No, sir; off on a vacashe."

"And the secretary, Mr. Montgomery Moore?"

"Sick."

"Ah, indeed! Other clerks on duty, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; hard at work."

"What at?"

"Reading newspapers, smoking cigars and wearing out easy-chair upholstery, when not shirking cocktails and juleps at the neighboring rum-mill."

"Ah! and when was the secretary to return to his desk?"

"When the president returns to his."

The detective looked up sharply.

"Yet the two are never seen in the offices at the same hour?"

"Never."

"How about my suspicions as to their double game?"

"I've got a better one, boss."

"Oho! as to their never being seen together?"

"Ay, my lord."

"What do you suspect?"

Tommy Dodd approached his master with mysterious and impressive gravity, and whispered in his ear.

The detective started.

"Hal the echo of my first suspicion," he muttered. "It should not take long for this to be verified. Go to your rest now, my boy. You shall stay by me hereafter until something new develops itself."

The College Nine were the richer by Mr. Dodd's association on the following day, and that young gentleman lost no time in pairing himself off with Miss Eggleston, as his companion-auxiliary, so to speak, with a picturesque gallantry and profusion of stage-mannerisms that were no less interesting than unique.

When the team reached Hudson City in the middle of the day, and were filing off for dinner at Mr. Barfield's residence, Drusilla, to her great joy, noted in the throng Fullhand, in the disguise of the preceding day.

"He is coming this way, too," she whispered to the detective. "Look out for him."

The pseudo old gentleman forthwith introduced himself to Short-Stop, as the captain of the team, and began to state the pleasure he proposed himself in following up the projected tour.

"We'll try to show you first class ball-playing from beginning to end, sir," said Short Stop, amiably. "I didn't catch your name, sir."

"Mr. Delancey," was the counterfeit's reply. "And I should greatly like a little private conversation with you at your leisure, sir."

CHAPTER XVI.

AT HUDSON CITY.

THE visiting team was received by Mr. Barfield with unassuming hospitality.

His residence was one of the finest in the charming suburbs of the town, and not its least attraction was Miss Letitia Barfield, who received her father's guests in her capacity of mistress of the house.

Indeed, she was so fascinating a young lady that Chris Payne believed he might have quickly lost his heart to her, but for the superior counter-attraction of Miss Eggleston's proximity.

The two young ladies 'took to each other' almost from the first; it was a most agreeable sort of liberty hall at the Barfield residence, and in a surprisingly short time all the young men of the team made or found themselves pleasantly at home.

"You might as well make up your minds to stay with me a week at least, all of you," Mr. Barfield took occasion to say at the midday meal. "I am quite sure I can arrange several matches for you with the local team here. They are capital amateur players, and their representative will call upon you this afternoon."

"We are impressed by your hospitable offer, sir," Short-Stop took it upon himself to reply.

"But I am afraid such a lengthy stay would hardly be consistent with our pre-arranged programme, which is to keep moving metropolis-ward—with a particular object in view. By the way, perhaps I have met the manager of the local nine here before. Who is he?"

Mr. Barfield made a slightly deprecating gesture.

"A man whom personally I detest," he replied, "though perhaps I should be more tolerant, since he has been the means of supplying

me with my favorite amusement quite frequently of late. But pshaw! he was prominent among the turbulent spectators of your yesterday's victory over the Cherry Valleys—a Mr. Baldwin Hitchcock, sometimes called Bricks, from the color of his hair."

Short-Stop started, and looked at his host almost with suspicion—though this feeling was but instantaneous—while the rest of the company were correspondingly interested.

"Ah, indeed!" he commented, after a pause.

"Yes; we all happen to know that individual. But how happens it he can be managing a baseball nine this far up the Hudson? Isn't he a New York City man?"

"I believe so. But he has been much in these parts since early last spring, when a rich sporting friend of his—a patron, you might say—set up a country gentleman's establishment in our neighborhood; in addition to several similar ones he is said to possess along the river. No end of money, they say; and I believe he is even a greater enthusiast in the game than myself."

"Ah! a gentleman by the name of Fullhand, perhaps?"

"Exactly. The rich Mr. Montague Fullhand, President of some great Silver Mining Company in New York. In fact, he has been wanting me to invest in its stock, though I haven't made up my mind to do so, as yet."

"You are acquainted with the gentleman, personally, Mr. Barfield?"

"Yes; and," with a laugh, "it's another case of my neighborliness running contrary to my predilections. I can't say that I like him personally, while my daughter yonder positively detests him."

"Oh, papa, not quite so bad as that, I hope!" cried Miss Barfield. "Still there is a certain something about Mr. Fullhand that—that I don't like."

"Sir," said Short Stop, "your graceful invitation to my associates and myself was, I presume, wholly spontaneous on your part, without any suggestion from either of the men under discussion?"

"Absolutely so," replied Mr. Barfield, with sincere surprise in his voice and manner. "However, as Bricks saw me looking on at your yesterday's match, he may very likely have suspected some such venture on my part. He is aware of my weakness."

"I am glad to hear that assurance from your lips, sir," remarked the captain of the Owensburgers; who then went on to converse upon widely different topics.

Mr. Barfield was evidently not a little mystified by all this; and, later on, when he saw Short-Stop being "interviewed" by the pseudo Mr. Delancey in a corner of his piazza, he amiably approached the pair, and spoke to the latter pleasantly.

"Mr. Delancey, however, quickly made his excuses, and hurried away."

"You are acquainted with that old gentleman, too?" inquired the detective.

"With Mr. Fullhand's sometime odd guest, Mr. Delancey? Yes; we have managed to scrape a passing acquaintance."

Short-Stop had by this time decided to take Mr. Barfield into his confidence.

He had at last decided that he was worthy of it, and that an opposite course might possibly lead to embarrassing complications, now that the Owensburg party were the gentleman's guests, and likely to remain so for several days at least.

He commenced his revelation in his own way.

"It's odd, my dear sir," said he, with his smiling sarcasm.

"What is—that I should have scraped an acquaintance with Mr. Delancey, Mr. Fullhand's guest?"

"I should say so."

"But why?"

"Because the one is but the other in disguise."

Mr. Barfield stared.

His further astonishment may be imagined when the detective had completed his revelation, which omitted nothing.

The latter then took the opportunity to summon Paul and his sister, together with Master Tommy Dodd, and make known to them the state of the case.

Miss Eggleston could not avoid a slight blush, in view of what Mr. Barfield might think of her own part in the oath-bound quest; but that gentleman's sympathetic gravity speedily relieved her of any embarrassment.

"All this is very extraordinary," he exclaimed. "Of course I had heard of the whispered elopement of Miss Moore with the silver mine president through mention in the country-side press, but had not given it more than a passing thought. An abduction, you say? My friends, you can depend upon my utmost co-operation. The man is evidently a consummate villain, and I am glad to have had my eyes opened."

"Fullhand has then posed in the neighborhood as an unmarried man, I suppose?" said Short-Stop.

"Yes; as a childless widower—the scoundrel! To think of my having even permitted him to make my daughter's acquaintance!—However, he might have exploited his wife—the Mrs.

Vavassour you speak of—in some one or another of his river-side country-places, while perhaps assuming a different character at each in his own capacity. The man is no little of a mystery; and, as I said before, you can command my services in hunting him down."

Here Miss Eggleston quitted the group, apparently with a sense of secret relief, to join Miss Barfield and Chris Payne, who were loitering not far away.

"The question is," interposed Paul, "ought we now to make a match with this Hudson City team, at all?"

"By all means—now more than ever," decided Short-Stop, promptly. "Why, Fullhand may have hidden Miss Moore away in this very vicinity! It would then be our great opportunity."

"I agree with you fully," said Mr. Barfield. "But here comes our man's man, as you might say."

He indicated Curveshot Balder, who was seen approaching the house by the path, leading up from the river-road.

"Mr. Hitchcock," was the detective's suave greeting, "it was a surprise to us, as you may well understand, for us to learn that you were in command of the team here, with whom we are thinking of making a match. But we are willing to let bygones be bygones, in the baseball line, if you say so."

The sport, who had doubtless anticipated a less comfortable welcome, disguised whatever ill-will he was treasuring, and proceeded to talk business without further preliminaries.

Successive match games, the best three in five, and the first to take place on the afternoon of the following day, were forthwith agreed on; after which Curveshot Balder returned to the town, accompanied by Mr. Tommy Dodd, who had been introduced to his consideration as a juvenile but thoroughbred lover of the game from New York City.

The terms of the match were speedily made public, and the consequence was that at the opening of the initial game of the series, there was an exceptionally large number of spectators present, even for so large and sport-loving a place as Hudson City.

CHAPTER XVII.

A RATTLING GOOD GAME.

"GENTLEMEN," cried Mr. Hitchcock, of the many aliases, with an unlooked-for urbanity, while addressing the men of the visiting team in the preliminaries for the opening game, "my associates and I are determined to forego all share in the choice of umpire on this occasion. The selection is left with you."

"That's too generous!" responded Short-Stop, in behalf of his associates, and not a little surprised. "The old way is good enough for us."

"No, no!" persisted Bricks. "We're bent on doing the hospitable, sir. However, Mr. Barfield himself as umpire would probably be highly acceptable to all."

Mr. Barfield gave Short-Stop a negative look, and the latter forthwith solved the difficulty, after a hurried consultation with Paul Eggleston, by selecting Curveshot Balder as umpire.

"I'll swear I wasn't fishing for that!" exclaimed the sport, as he accepted the responsible position amid the cheers of his party.

"We shan't think that of you," responded Short-Stop, adding to himself: "And neither are we humbugged as to the true motive of your apparent magnanimity, my man!" After which the game opened.

It was a toughly-contested one throughout. The anomaly was presented of the Hudson City team being composed of both better players and rougher characters than the last opponents with whom the Owensburgers had contended—and there are pretty rough elements among the upper river towns, as those familiar with the localities can attest—and at the same time being, superficially at least, much more gentlemanly in their manner of play and general behavior.

This good feature also impressed itself upon the spectators. From first to last there was no end of interest and enthusiasm, and yet hardly a break in the cheerful good-humor, and a prevailing desire to see fair play and no favor.

The game was won by the home team, chiefly on its merits, it would seem, but really by reason of purposely sluggish action on the part of Short-Stop's individual play.

"We couldn't do better than give them the first game," the latter subsequently explained. "It is our best policy, if we are going to further any ulterior ends in the neighborhood."

Moreover, Bricks's rulings had been singularly fair throughout, and accordingly every one was apparently in the very best good-humor.

As Short-Stop was quitting the grounds in Mr. Barfield's company, the pair were approached by a group composed of two counterfeiters and one solid coin, so to speak.

In other words, its ingredients were the pseudo old man, Mr. Delancey, the pretended young dude, Miss Eggleston, *en caractere*, and Mr. Tommy Dodd, of New York.

"Mr. Falconbridge," said the latter, "here is Mr. Delancey, who wants you to stop at his country place, on your way back up the hill."

"Not quite that," corrected the bogus old gentleman, smiling behind his gray whiskers and big spectacles. "It isn't my country place, as Mr. Barfield knows, but the property of my good friend and patron, Mr. Montague Fullhand, at present unfortunately away from home. I am permitted, however, to do the honors during his absence, and nothing would please me better than to have you all as my chance guests for the nonce."

The invitation was accepted, apparently in the blandest spirit of unsuspecting.

Mr. Fullhand's river-side seat was much more pretentious than Mr. Barfield's, but not so home-appearing, and, with plenty of servants at his command, Mr. Delancey did the brief honors of the afternoon with tact and discretion.

"I like you, sir," he took occasion to say to Short-Stop in private, before the visit terminated, "and would feel highly gratified if you could call on me again—say this evening or tomorrow evening—so that I might confer with you more at my leisure."

"I like to be liked by everybody, Mr. Delancey," was the other's blunt reply. "But I can't imagine why you should wish to see me again, and in private."

The other gave him a quick look through the spectacles.

"Confess," said he, "that you have some ulterior object in view other than winning match-games at base-ball."

"Well, sir, and what then?"

"Both Mr. Dodd and Mr. Smith—those charming young men who assisted me in obtaining your company to-day—have deigned to give me a hint as to the nature of that ulterior object."

"The deuce they have!" And Short-Stop seemed to be not a little embarrassed.

"Yes, sir; but don't be alarmed. I can be discreet; and at the same time I am not in sympathy with my friend Fullhand's corrupt practices. In fact, he knows precious well how heartily I detest them, which is something odd that he should continue to trust me so implicitly."

"What are you talking about, Mr. Delancey?"

"The abduction of the young lady, whose deliverance is the secret object of your base-balling masquerade," was blurted out, seemingly half-angrily.

"Oho!"

"Yes, sir; but tell me first, Mr. Falconbridge, if I can depend on your discretion."

"To the top-notch."

"And, in the event of my 'giving away' my friend Fullhand in this disgraceful and reprehensible matter, you would not let him know the source of your information?"

"He should know no more of it than he does at the present moment."

"Good! thank you, sir! You see, I am not only under obligations to Mr. Fullhand, but don't mind confessing that I am also a little afraid of him."

"Make yourself easy. Do you give me to understand that you know where the scoundrel has hidden away the young lady he abducted?"

"Not yet; but I shall assuredly make the discovery within, say twenty-four hours, and communicate it to you."

"Thanks, Mr. Delancey, I perceive you are a conscientious man."

"I try to do my Christian duty, sir."

"Do you imagine that the young lady might be held a prisoner somewhere in this neighborhood?"

"Bless you, no, sir!" with undue eagerness.

"She is imprisoned somewhere in New York City. Of that much I am convinced."

"Ah!" and Short-Stop seemed to be greatly disappointed. "Well, Mr. Delancey, when you have the information ready for me, please let me know at Mr. Barfield's."

"Yes, yes; of course. But couldn't you stroll around this way at, say, ten o'clock to-night?"

"Can't promise, really. Mr. Dodd is my clerk. If you should have anything special to communicate, you might let me know by him, or by your dudish young friend Mr. Smith, or in any other way."

"Ah, well! But I trust you will not misinterpret my motives in this matter, Mr. Falconbridge."

"No danger of that, I think, Mr. Delancey."

On the walk back to Mr. Barfield's with his friends, the detective communicated what had passed; and all were agreed that the disguised Fullhand was preparing some especially cunning piece of knavery in his own interest.

"However," said Short-Stop, "he imagines himself perfectly secure in his disguise. There is that much in our favor."

"Do you think for a moment," asked Mr. Barfield, "that he really intends revealing the young lady's hiding-place?"

"Not for an instant; though, of course, I shall pretend to take the utmost stock in Mr. Delancey's professions."

"And do you think that she is concealed somewhere in New York, as he asserted?" asked Miss Eggleston, who played her masculine part in seemingly blind unconsciousness of even Mr. Barfield's presence.

"By no means; or he would not have asserted it with such eagerness."

"'Tis true, 'tis pity, and pity 'tis 'tis true," interposed Mr. Tommy Dodd, with a brief return to his ultra stage manner and sepulchral tone. "Me liege lord, I shall e'en drop in again on the aged seneschal in the course of this mystic eventide, and perhaps have matters of strange import to relate anon. Till then, I am your liegeman still, and mum's the ticket to the crack o' doom."

The pretended Mr. Smith burst into a ringing laugh. But for all that, Tommy Dodd was as good as his word.

Late that evening, in Mr. Barfield's drawing-room, where Miss Letitia and Miss Eggleston (the latter once more in her true character, as a matter of course) were successfully entertaining the young men of the college team with some good music, Short-Stop was mysteriously called out of the room by Tommy Dodd.

"Good!" commented the former, after receiving his little subordinate's communication. "I go at once. You might as well follow me at a distance."

But there was yet one other, besides Tommy Dodd, that followed the detective when, a few minutes later, he set out in the direction of the Fullhand country-seat.

It was Drusilla Eggleston, who had hastily excused herself to the company for the evening, and now, once more in her masculine character, also kept the moving figure of Short-Stop in sight.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN AMBUSCADE.

SHORT-STOP was on the lookout for continued deception on the part of the bogus Mr. Delancey, but hardly anticipating the real danger that was before him.

He had no sooner turned up the shaded pathway, leading through the Fullhand grounds, before five or six ambushed ruffians suddenly attacked him with silent but deadly fury.

Tommy Dodd, who was following but a short distance behind, would have sprung to his master's assistance, but that at the same moment he was summarily seized from behind and tossed over the road-bank and into the river, twenty or thirty feet below.

Then the disguised Drusilla was just on the point of drawing a pistol, and discharging it in the air to sound the alarm, or at one of the detective's shadowy assailants, she hardly knew which, when a strong hand was clapped over her mouth, and she found herself helpless in a grasp of iron.

"The slightest resistance, my little whipper-snapper, and you are dead!" growled a hoarse voice in her ear.

Then, though perceiving that Short-Stop was already ridding himself of his assailants by the exercise of his lightning-like pugilistic address, she was dragged off into a narrow wooded pathway to the left, as though no more than a doll in her mysterious captor's grasp, for all that she was of robust frame and fearless spirit.

She felt sure she was being hurried back somewhat in the direction of Mr. Barfield's house, but could make no resistance.

"Swear that you'll make no outcry!" presently muttered her captor. "Do this, and I will release you."

They had reached a spot where the path opened into a sort of moonlighted little woodland glade.

She managed to nod her head in assent, and was straightway thrust up against a tree, while her captor, suddenly releasing his powerful hold upon her person, folded his arms and stepped back a pace, regarding her warily.

Now for the first time could she see what he was like.

A strongly-built, well-dressed man, whose features were concealed by a closely-fitting mask, whose disguise was further assisted by a slouching wide-awake hat.

Such was as near as she could make out in the uncertain light.

Breathless, besides being sore from his ruffianly grasp, the courageous young woman, nevertheless, did not forget her fictitious masculinity.

"Scoundrel!" she exclaimed, indignantly, at the same time roughening her rich contralto voice as best she could; "what would you with me?"

A low chuckling laugh—something in whose inflection sounded a secret alarm in her woman's heart—was the unknown's only answer.

"I am penniless, besides being without watch or chain, if robbery is your object," she faltered.

There was a response now, and such a one as completed her trepidation.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the fellow, in a low voice, which she seemed to have heard somewhere before. "As if money or watches and chains were all that there is worth having, my beauty!"

Beauty! She shuddered inwardly, but still maintained a bold front.

"Other's kidnap pretty women," continued the ruffian, and his eyes fairly blazed through his mask. "Why not I, as well?"

"What are you talking about?" gasped the maiden, now almost beside herself with terror.

"You know well enough, Miss Eggleston," was the cool response. "The deuce! what is a masculine disguise, even for a noble shapeliness such as yours, in the penetrative eyes of passion and of love. My darling! my angel!"

He made a movement to seize her. But a footstep on an adjoining path had at that instant caught her ear, and she suddenly darted to one side in its direction, with a parting gasp of loathing fear, and too much frightened to give her revolver another thought.

With a harsh oath, the man sprung in pursuit.

But the chase was amid thick underwood in which the girl's lithe figure and fawn-like movements, unhampered by the flowing garments habitual to her sex, to say nothing of her winged fear, were at a considerable advantage, and, moreover, that saving footstep was yet more audible in her ears, could she only blunder upon the pathway it was threading.

Nevertheless, her pursuer's superior rough-strength began to tell in his favor after his first staggering surprise.

"Stop, girl, or I shall show no mercy!" he furiously called after her. "By Jupiter! you'll rue this trick!"

He was almost within arm's-length behind her. In fancy she could feel herself again in that bated grasp, together with his hot breath on her neck. But at that instant there was a glimpse of a moon-silvered path, and the saving step upon it had suddenly paused, as if its owner were alert and listening.

With a sharp, low cry, she reached the path. "Oh, Mr. Barfield, it is you!" she cried, beginning to reel as she recognized the gentleman's approach. "Save me—save me! I—"

At this instant her pursuer's ruffianly grasp once more infolded her, with a savage oath.

But it was over in another moment. The fellow reeled back under a crushing blow in the mask, and, suddenly releasing her, disappeared, without a word, into the wood. Then everything swam before the masquerading girl's eyes, and she found herself in Mr. Barfield's arms.

"Dear Drusilla, thank God for this opportunity to serve you!" were his first impassioned words; but he seemed to recollect himself instantly. "This is truly an adventure, Miss Eggleston," he went on to say, as she struggled, blushing painfully, out of his embrace. "Ah, when will you recognize the danger of assuming any habit but what pertains to you—any character but your own loveliness?" And he indicated her costume with a half-angry gesture.

"Oh, sir, don't mind me," faltered Drusilla. "Quick! let us run. Mr. Falconbridge may be killed. He was being assaulted by several men when that scoundrel gagged me and hurried me away. Come, come, come! Oh, he may be killed!"

She had suited the action to the word, and now he was running at her side, as she flew back in the direction of the place where she had last seen Short-Stop so hard pressed.

But when the spot was reached the danger was at an end.

The detective had just finished polishing his fifth and last assailant by knocking him head over heels into the river, the others having been put to flight; and Master Tommy Dodd was at the same moment being assisted by his master up the steep bank, dripping wet, but not discouraged.

As Drusilla and Barfield came on the scene with their explanations, the pseudo Mr. Delancey made his appearance from the direction of the house, followed by a scared-looking hired man, bearing a lantern.

Mr. Delancey was likewise, to all appearances, the prey to poorly disguised terror.

"Can it be possible?" he exclaimed, throwing up his hands in the moonlight, when the necessary explanations were made and exchanged. "Such ruffianism right at the entrance to Mr. Fullhand's grounds! Bless me! What will he say when he hears of it? I hope no one has been seriously hurt."

"I can only answer for myself," replied the detective, dryly. "By the feeling in my fists, the blackguards who set upon me doubtless have their own impression in the matter."

"A mere trifle, so far as I am concerned," carelessly remarked Master Tommy Dodd, though quite the reverse of dryly. "Ugh! By my halidome, a pretty pass, though fortunately the weather is warm." And he gingerly stepped out of a pool of water that had been insidiously forming about his feet.

Drusilla had so far recovered from her fright as to burst into a laugh at the stagey youth's bedraggled appearance; while Mr. Barfield maintained a smiling serenity that somewhat belied his true feelings, which had been a trifle disappointed, if not also unpleasantly enlightened, by the trembling eagerness with which the young woman had forgotten her own alarm in her fears for Short-Stop's safety.

They had all started up the path toward the Fullhand house, with Short-Stop and Mr. De-

lancey in the lead, when a shot rung out from the bordering shrubberies.

"I say, my friend," coolly observed the detective, as the attendant bullet grazed his ear, "isn't this sort of thing getting a trifle monotonous?"

CHAPTER XIX.

A NIGHT'S ADVENTURES.

MR. DELANCEY'S knees were fairly knocking together.

"Goodness gracious!" he faltered, through his chattering teeth; "are we beset by invisible murderers?"

Here the first shot was succeeded by another, and it was Short-Stop's other ear that was tickled by the leaden accompaniment in consequence.

The detective darted into the shrubbery, but returned almost instantly, shaking his head.

"No good!" he muttered lightly. "Such curs are not in ambush to be nipped at their work."

Miss Eggleston grasped his arm with a solicitude that secretly thrilled, while it caused a corresponding dejection on the part of Barfield.

"You must not stay here!" she exclaimed energetically. "There is death in the air, and you are the target."

"It looks like it, boss!" cried Tommy Dodd, who had fished out from somewhere on his drenched person a revolver almost as big as himself, and was standing alert with it at half-cock, like one of Buffalo Bill's ambuscaded cowboys in the chaparral of Erastina Park. "But, now as ever, I'm your man!"

"Miss Eggleston's advice seems the best," advised Mr. Barfield. "Better return to my house till this extraordinary state of affairs can be explained."

"No, no!" excitedly interposed the fictitious Delancey, by this time recovered in some measure from his knock-kneed condition. "Wasn't it back yonder that the mysterious assaults began? Hurry on up to Mr. Fullhand's house, which is but a few steps away, and from there we can send notification to the police."

This last advice was just here emphasized by yet another shot from the shrubberies, the bullet this time making a neat hole in the detective's hat, half an inch above his hair.

"I reckon if my mug escapes the fourth time, it will be by mistake," was Short-Stop's comment. "Come along!"

And, suddenly placing himself between Delancey and the lantern-bearer, with an iron grip on the arm of each, he forthwith led the way up the moonlighted path.

A large and pretentious country house, with ample, well-kept grounds!

"Go on in; I shall remain on guard," said Miss Eggleston, coolly drawing her revolver, and making a sign to Tommy Dodd to likewise remain, while the others were ascending the piazza steps. "I have a motive in this."

Barfield turned to look at her in mingled astonishment and protest, but Short-Stop had caught a look in her face which he seemed to understand.

"Leave Smith to his own devices," he said abruptly, leading on into the house. "He seems to know what he is about."

"Mr. Dodd, I see that you are a gentleman of nerve," observed Drusilla, when the two were alone outside.

"I have been called a mere scene-chewer, miss," was the modest reply. "But I fondly imagine that high tragedy is my native home—off or on the classic boards."

"Good! You patrol round yonder side of the grounds, while I take this side. We shall meet at the skirt of the dense evergreens which I perceive back of the stables and compare notes."

"Me lady, I shall only blench when grind-stones swim and water flows up hill!"

They accordingly separated as suggested, and it turned out well that they did so.

Master Tommy Dodd was of about the same height as Miss Eggleston, and, in spite of a mock-tragic strut and stride inseparable from his movements, of a carriage and proportions not dissimilar from the young lady's characteristics in her masculine role, especially as seen by the uncertain shimmer and shadow of the lonely moonlighted grounds they were designing to patrol.

As a consequence, when Drusilla cautiously approached the skirting evergreens alluded to, without encountering any fresh adventure, and perceived the doughty youth coming toward her, while hugging the screening shadows a little more closely than she, the resemblance was noticeable even by herself, though in a somewhat comical sense.

"How much the absurd little fellow mirrors me, in my present guise!" she thought, with a smile. "True, it is scarcely possible that I can have that stilted, melodramatic bearing of his, which so laughably suggests a human grasshopper on the war-path; but his clothes are of a like cut to mine, from his derby to his boots, we are of about the one height and weight, and it boots not that the proportions that make us both rather miniature men should likewise render me more than an average-sized woman in my own proper habiliments. Verily, notwithstanding that the fiction has an independence of

its own, I shall forswear the unsexing disguise forever at the first opportunity!"

She was about hastening forward and disclosing herself, when suddenly Mr. Dodd was surprised, disarmed, gagged and pinioned in a jiffy before her very eyes by a powerful, masked figure, that had sprung out from the evergreens with the noiselessness of a phantom.

It was scarcely less a surprise to the young woman witnessing the scene than to the stage-struck youth himself.

But Drusilla was an exceptionally bold and fearless woman.

In another moment, clutching her pistol tightly, she had stolen to a little open nook amid the evergreens, whither the masked ruffian had incontinently dragged his vainly-struggling victim, and was on the point of demanding his release at the revolver's muzzle, when some muttered words of the former caused her no little astonishment, together with an instantaneous modification of her plan.

It was at once apparent that the ruffian was identical with her own assailant of a short time previous, and that he had mistaken his fresh captive for none other than herself.

"So, my little beauty, I've got you again, eh?" growled the fellow, easily controlling and gagging his captive with one hand, while amusedly holding up the captured weapon with the other. "Cannon-balls and bomb-shells! what could your pretty little woman's hands be doing with such a piece of field-artillery as this? Ha, ha, ha! But I love you just the same, my pretty masquerading maid; and you shall forthwith away with me to a certain dovecote, secure and dainty, that I know of. Gad! you shall have company there with a pet cage-bird of my master's own; and I doubt not that he will forgive my liberty with his woodland retreat when he learns that you are our fair acquaintance of other days—the comely school-marm of our whilom stock-booming experience, no less than the sister of Miss Moore's disconsolate lover, Paul Eggleston himself. So, come along with you, my beauty! for this time there is no marplot of a rescuer to interfere in your behalf."

Here his astounded victim managed to make some muffled protests through the great hand that was closed so tightly over his lips and face, while its attendant muscular arm successfully mastered his struggles.

"It's all a mistake!" he gasped out. "Villain, on your life, unhand me!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Woman-like to the core! Yes, yes; I'll unhand you when you are safely caged, along with the fair Nettie, and not before. Shall Fullhand have the bird-caging all to himself? Not if I know it. Come along, you little rascal!"

"But it's a beastly mistake, I tell you!" sputtered Tommy. "I ain't a woman any more'n you are! I'm—I'm—"

Drusilla gritted her pretty teeth at his folly in not letting the misapprehension continue unchallenged; but nevertheless her own plan—which was to take silent advantage of the strange blunder in order to discover the secret prison-house where Nettie Moore was confined—was not seriously interrupted.

"Ha, ha, ha!" again laughed the ruffian, who she was now quite convinced could be none other than Umpire Baldwin Hitchcock, of the numerous aliases. "My dear Miss Eggleston, you are quite woman enough for me, at all events, your mannish togger to the contrary notwithstanding. So come along, my darling. I'm thinking of matrimony, no less than my superior; and the three thousand dollars of yours that have been passed to my credit on the Zorilla Company's stock-book will be all the dowry I shall ask, in consideration of your stunning good looks, which, when not disguised by this unsexing disguise, I chance to know are beyond all computation."

He disappeared into the deep wood, dragging the now completely exhausted Tommy along with him.

Drusilla, whose eyes had fairly glistened at this last revelation on the unconscious scoundrel's part, set her teeth, grasped her weapon yet tighter, and warily followed.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RUINED BLOCK-HOUSE.

It was by a long, narrow and tortuous path through the woods, which seemed to grow denser at every step, and whose steadily increasing blackness scarcely a moonbeam penetrated, that the fearless young woman followed the masked ruffian and his captive.

However, she managed to do so without awakening any suspicion.

At last a broad, comparatively open rocky glade was reached, where, as the flooding moonlight again came pouring down uninteruptedly, she was compelled to shrink back once more amid the underwood, lest her presence should be discovered.

The shadowy outlines of a large house of peculiar construction showed against the background of rocks and trees, while a joyous mountain-brookbrawled musically through the open.

Here the ruffian, with another coarse laugh, and the gruff words: "Now then, squeal your-

loudest, if you will, my beauty! There's never a friendly ear to heed you here, save my own," released his captive, and stood off a step or two to inspect him (or her, as he thought,) for the first time critically in the moonlight.

Then he reeled back, with a savage oath, and the captured revolver, which he had continued to carry in his disengaged hand, fell unheeded out of his grasp.

"Great Scott!" he roared. "Why, you ain't the young lady at all!"

"Of course, you pig-headed supernumerary!" retorted Mr. Dodd, once more the master of his ready wit and native impudence. "Didn't I keep telling you so when I had the chance?"

"The devil! you're only that ridiculous little dandified shrimp that was dancing attendance upon Short-Stop during the match-game to-day."

Tommy's only response was an indignant sort of sputter, and then, with a swift, unexpected hop, skip and dive, he had recovered his artillery.

"Shrimp, eh?" he cried, dancing back into the wood, and beginning to blaze away point-blank at his theretofore captor. *Pop! pop! pop!* "Shrimp, eh?" *Bang! bang! bang!* *pop! pop! pop!* "You miserable, overgrown scene-shifter! I'm only a dandified shrimp, eh?" *Pop! pop! pop!*

"Hold on!" cried the ruffian, dodging here and there, behind this and that obstruction, to avoid the bullets. "What are you about, you young scoundrel? I'll skin you alive! Ha!"

And then, as Tommy, having exhausted his ammunition, took to flight back through the dense wood, he sprung in pursuit.

Miss Eggleston quietly remained in hiding, for lights began to appear in various windows of the queer-looking house, and presently a night-capped head was thrust out of one of the lower windows, while a cracked voice called out, with an African accent:

"Whar be you, John Henry Alexander? What's all dat shootin' an' bangin'? Am a junk-shop bu'sted, or a flah-wuks factory bruk loose? Whar be you, John Henry Alexander?"

A number of smaller and apparently woolly heads had crowded into the window-space around the night-capped one of the speaker; and then a lumbering and almost gigantic figure made its appearance from the door of a small outhouse underneath.

"Heah I be, Arrybeller Mariar Alexander," grumbled the latter. "You think it's de Fourt' ob July, dat you kick up all dis rumpus, rousin' out 'spectable folks at de dead ob night? Ha! but I done smell gunpowder. Sampson Augustus Alexander, eff you done been playin' tricks by moonlight, I'll bu'st ebery bone in dat brack skin ob you'n!"

Here there was a confused chorus of negro voices, all crying out at once, in response.

It was a regular Babel till a white figure appeared in another window, seemingly very high up in the air, and a very sweet and musical, albeit startled, voice called down to know what it was all about.

"Oh, it's jess nuffin' at all, I 'spect, Miss Nettie," at last called back the man from the house-yard. "Seems to me I did hear Marsar Brick's voice, togedder wif anudder one, jess afore de bangin' commenced, but I reckon it wa'n't much ob a shindig. Go to bed, Miss Nettie, an' res' yo' putty little head. Even eff Marsa Fullhand sh'd come round at dis time ob night, I wouldn't let him 'noy you."

"Thank you, John Henry! Annoy me, indeed! I should say not!"

Then the airy window was heard to shut down, and the white-robed figure disappeared.

In a few minutes more the heads also vanished from the lower window, the gigantic man re-entered his sentry-box, as it might be called, and, save for a light continuing to flicker dimly from the high casement at which the young lady had appeared, the deep, slumber-suggesting hush once more gradually resumed its reign over the strange domicile.

Miss Eggleston waited until quite sure that the coast was clear, and then cautiously advanced out of the wood for a closer inspection of the place.

To her astonishment, the little out-building, into which the huge negro had disappeared, proved to be really a sentry-box, while the main building itself was disclosed as a regular old block-house of the colonial period. And then she began to remember of having heard something when a child of such a ruinous relic of the Indian-fighting days as being somewhere buried away among the wild forested hills of that section of the country.

But the comparatively excellent preservation of the tall, fortified work could not but fill her with surprise, though a closer examination betrayed signs of recent efforts at restoration.

Still the house stood as a remarkable historical monument, and so heavy and stanch were the oak and chestnut logs of its original construction that, apart from the repairs which had been attempted, it bade fair to remain intact for years.

Doubtless only its seclusion amid the dense woods—perhaps part and parcel of some long-neglected estate—had prevented it from becoming one of the great landmarks of the period.

It was octagonal in shape, conical roofed, three sections in height, each projecting over the one directly underneath, and each section consisting of two stories, or tiers, of narrow, slit-like windows, originally to facilitate musket-firing downward and outward in all directions, although some few of the casements had been enlarged and provided with glass-sashes, in accordance with modern domiciliary demands.

"What a treasure for the historian and the newspaper-man is here going to waste within a hundred and odd miles of New York City!" thought the disguised young woman. "Why, it's a Revolutionary treasure! And to think of its being the prison house of a kidnapped young lady in this busy, mystery-sifting age!"

The one window remaining lighted was in the extreme upper tier, not less than sixty feet from the ground, and Drusilla had recognized the voice of the speaker therefrom as Miss Moore's own, though she had but a slight acquaintance with the young lady, having met her only once or twice in Paul's company.

How to communicate with the occupant of that aerial cage without arousing the suspicions of her jailers, as the negro family of big and little Alexanders apparently were, became the problem of the moment.

The window was too high to be signaled by tossing pebbles against the panes, even if such a means might be resorted to with due secrecy.

However, after carefully examining the queer tower-like old structure on every side, Drusilla at last discovered a series of stout wooden stakes or pins projecting one above another from the successive loophole tiers, which might have been used for drying the skins of wild animals at some period when the building had fallen into disuse for purely defensive purposes.

These, fortunately, presented themselves at a shaded angle, and led on up to a loophole but a short distance to one side of the enlarged or casementized opening still showing the light, and doubtless belonging to the prisoner's chamber.

Drusilla was strong, active and athletic beyond the average of her sex, and, as has been seen, she was of a dauntless and enterprising mold.

She swung up into a sitting attitude on one of these great pegs.

A careful inspection showed it to be still firm-placed and trustworthy, though dark and externally crumbling from the wind and weather of many years.

If one was thus secure, why not the rest?

They were separated, one above another, by regular intervals of something more than four feet.

She managed to attain a sitting posture on the second peg only after a good deal of difficulty; but, after a long rest, discovered that there was a knack in the method of ascent, which a little thought and observation enabled her to master; and then she continued on up somewhat more easily.

However, on seating herself next to the top-most peg, she found it much more rotten than its predecessors, and presently, much to her secret alarm, she found it unmistakably giving way under her weight.

To fall from such a height was tantamount to a broken neck, or a fractured limb or two, to say nothing of the peril of a detection that would put a summary end to her fine intentions with regard to the captive maiden.

For an instant her heart was in her mouth, and she was on the point of crying out.

Just then, however, while hugging the wall hard, she managed to clutch the peg overhead; this one was firm-set, and as, with a spurning movement, she gained vantage upon it, the one below crumbled away altogether down the side of the house, causing a great clattering racket in its descent.

But even this was fortunate, though it cut off her escape for the time being, for even at that moment she slipped into one of the upper embrasures out of sight from below, while the racket only brought Miss Moore again to her casement, close at hand, without disturbing the colored folks of the lower floor.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAIDEN IN THE TOWER.

"HIST!" called out Drusilla, as Nettie again thrust her head out of the adjoining casement; "I am a friend."

Nettie with difficulty mastered a little scream, for the speaker had once more leaned out on the last projecting peg, and was more than half-disclosed in the moonlight.

"Don't be alarmed," cautioned Drusilla. "I am not a man, but a woman disguised as such."

"A woman!" gasped the imprisoned maiden, incredulously.

"Yes; though it does seem improbable and romantic. More than that, I am Drusilla Eggleston, Paul's sister, and I am here to save you. How shall I reach you?"

"Wait!" After a brief pause, during which Nettie seemed to be mastering the situation. "Go back into the loop-hole. I will manage it." And she forthwith disappeared.

Drusilla obeyed, and presently heard the other pulling at the old boards that imperfectly walled up the inner side of the narrow opening.

She assisted at this work, and a few moments later the young women were in each other's arms.

"Oh, I can scarcely realize it!" murmured Nettie, sobbing on the other's shoulder. "Come quickly into my room! They are as vigilant as foxes down below there, and John Henry would kill you without mercy were you discovered here."

As Drusilla followed her, she took in her immediate surroundings with a comprehensive glance, for sufficient moonlight filtered in through the imperfectly boarded-up wall-slits to render everything comparatively distinct.

It was an enormous octagonal apartment, comprising the entire uppermost house-space, with the single exception of the small compartment assigned to the fair captive's use.

A rude ladder reached dwindlingly far up into the somber mysteries of the ruinous conical roof directly overhead, in which there seemed to be a constant flurry of bats or owls going on. At its foot was an open hatchway, apparently communicating into a similar vast apartment below, but presenting neither steps nor ladder by which it could be reached.

"It is by this means that my captivity is assured," said Nettie, understanding the nature of her companion's sweeping glance. "When my jailers, or their scoundrel of a master, would communicate with me, a ladder is raised from the next floor below, and taken away again on my being left to myself."

Drusilla did not answer at once, but followed the young girl into the rather cosy little bedroom partitioned off from the rest.

Then as the latter went on to express her joy at the meeting, and to betray a most extraordinary misconception as to the geography of her location, Miss Eggleston at last interrupted her, with an astonished air.

"In the name of all that's wonderful, my dear!" she exclaimed; "in what region do you imagine this prison-tower of yours to be situated?"

"Why, in the heart of the Adirondack wilderness, as a matter of course!" replied the young girl.

Then Drusilla burst out laughing.

"Am I mistaken, then?" demanded Nettie. "You see, they chloroformed me when I was kidnapped out of my mother's garden. And even long after I had recovered from the drug, I was speechless, while Mr. Fullhand and his friend kept me constantly on the move. When they brought me here at last, under the care of these colored people, I seemed to have been almost constantly traveling through wild, wooded ways, and Mr. Fullhand assured me that I was at last on a hunting estate of his in the heart of the Adirondacks, whence I should never be able to get away, save in his company, and as his wedded bride. These colored people have always borne him out in that assertion. Am I then nearer or further from civilization than he pretended?"

"You poor child!" exclaimed Drusilla. "You are not more than three miles back from Hudson City, and probably less than thirty from Albany."

Nettie opened her eyes with astonishment, which was naturally increased indefinitely when Drusilla put her in possession of the particulars of her own presence in the block-house, which she proceeded to do at once.

"Oh, it is like a happy dream!" cried Nettie, clasping her hands when all had been told. "What! the college base-ball team are under oath to accomplish my deliverance?"

"Yes, my dear."

"And Paul—my Paul!" with a bright blush—"among them?"

"Of course."

"And that wonderful detective, Short-Stop Maje, as their leader?"

"To be sure."

"Oh, then I shall be soon free—free again!"

"Undoubtedly, my dear Nettie. But then we must proceed cautiously, for I doubt not that your captor, Fullhand, is a man of much power and many secret resources. My first step must be to communicate your whereabouts to Short-Stop and the team. But now you must tell me more fully of your own situation."

"Oh, there is so much to tell, and yet so little that is not painful and humiliating. My own mother's conduct in the matter, from what you tell me, is the most distressing to me. Worldly and grasping as I have known poor mamma to be, I was unprepared for such conduct."

"Still, you must have suspected her complicity almost at once?"

"Not quite; but only when I came to a realization of my position, and saw the trunks of my regularly packed garments that had accompanied my abduction."

"When was that?"

"On the morning of the following day. We seemed to have been traveling to somewhere all night on a railroad, and I was being transferred to a country wagon. It was in a village, but, though I suddenly realized everything, I was paralyzed and speechless from the after-

effects of the drug, and incapable of making known my predicament."

"And your abductors?"

"They were thoroughly at home in the situation. Fullhand had disguised himself so as to appear a very old man, with white beard and spectacles."

"Aha! as Mr. Delancey?"

"Yes; from what you tell me. Well, he passed me off as an invalid daughter, and Mr. Bricks helped him to keep up the deception. After we had driven off into the thick woods they did not so much care."

"Ah! Speech then returned to you?"

"Yes; and you may well believe I used it in my indignation. But they were serenely unconcerned or impudent, while the driver of our team was none other than John Henry Alexander, the unconscionable old colored man, who seems to belong to Fullhand, body and soul."

"Mr. Fullhand, in response to my upbraidings, coolly claimed that my own mother had conspired in my abduction. As he pointed to my trunks in the wagon, in corroboration of his assertion, I could say nothing further on that score."

"Whither are you taking me?" I at last demanded. He replied, as I have stated, that my destination was a hunting-lodge of his in the bosom of the wild Adirondacks, where, he added, I would be made comfortable, until such time as I should consent to be his wife."

"When I laughed the idea to scorn, he quietly replied with a smile: 'We shall see how your antipathy to me shall hold out. It is somewhat lonesome in the great North Woods.'

"From what you tell me of my nearness to populous points, they must have purposely kept driving about by the most forbidding and unfrequented roads they could select, in order to give color to the fiction they were fabricating."

"At all events we were never once out of the woods during that tedious, jolting drive, which lasted without interruption the greater part of the day."

"And only two or three times did we pass within sight of any habitations, which were too distant for my voice to reach, had I appealed for assistance."

"However, even had it been otherwise, there is little doubt but I would have been summarily gagged on the spot."

"Late in the afternoon we arrived at this place, my apartment was assigned to me, and my captivity as 'a tower maiden' was begun."

CHAPTER XXII.

NETTIE MOORE'S STORY CONTINUED.

"An extraordinary story!" exclaimed Drusilla. "Indeed, it would seem hardly credible, but for the strange circumstances that seem to have facilitated your abduction at the hands of this accomplished scoundrel. But go on, my dear child. Did Fullhand remain after transferring you to the custody of these colored wretches?"

"No; though I have been under the impression that he must be living somewhere in the vicinity of the block-house, since he has not failed to visit me every day, to urge his detestable suit afresh."

"Does he come disguised, or in his own personality?"

"Sometimes as one, sometimes as the other. He is never insulting, but only quietly persistent."

"He offers the arguments customary in such a case, I believe. If I will only consent to become his wife, I shall at once roll in wealth and luxury, with my wildest caprice gratified as soon as expressed, and all that sort of thing."

"Even my pronounced and invariable repugnance seems to have little or no effect upon him."

"You will come to like me in good time, my dear," he will say. 'If I am old enough to be your father, I am also tender enough to be your husband, and I love you to distraction.'

"I not only laugh him to scorn, but have not hesitated to boldly avow my plighted troth to your brother Paul. All to no avail."

"I can afford to wait for your change of heart," he will reply. 'When that occurs just let me know. A parson and your own dear mother shall be produced in short order; and after you are my wife the world of pleasure shall be at your pretty feet. I may even bring a fine lady, a distant relative of mine, and a woman versed in the extravagant frivolities of existence, to keep you company.'

"He had referred to this person so many times that my curiosity was at length excited, and he confessed that he had reference to my mother's ultra-fashionable boarder, Madame Vavassour."

"I was surprised, for Mr. Fullhand and she had seemed to have met before coming together at mamma's house, and, indeed, had seemed to have no liking for each other while under the one roof. Mr. Fullhand explained this by saying that there had been long a coolness between him and his Cousin Florine, as he called her, by reason of certain money matters; but that he hoped to become friends with her again for my sake, because she was such a fine woman, and could help me along so materially in the world

of fashion, where I would ultimately queen it as his bride."

"Oh, but it is altogether too ridiculous and too painful!"

"Mr. Falconbridge—Short-Stop, you know—has dropped me some odd hints as to this Vavassour woman," said Drusilla, reflectively.

"My dear, should you be brought in contact with her, you must beware."

"I should do so in any event, for I have never liked the lady, though mamma seemed to think her a sort of princess in disguise. But is she a woman of bad character?"

"I think so, but I do not know. At all events, she is more likely to be Mr. Fullhand's confederate than his relative.—They seemed to have made pretty thorough preparations for your reception here?"

And Drusilla, though not for the first time, threw her glance around the apartment, whose appointments were of the best, and even luxurious.

"The room would be a pleasant one under happier circumstances," Nettie admitted in reply. "But, oh, Miss Eggleston, you can't imagine how lonely it is up here!"

"Yes, I can, my dear."

"Then the bats and owls make such strange noises overhead at times! I often feel that I shall grow mad with the solitude, notwithstanding that shelf full of novels in the corner yonder."

"Then you are never permitted to go lower down than this floor?"

"Never."

"How do these colored people treat you?"

"Like a little prize pig, as far as my food and drink and bodily comfort are concerned," replied Nettie, with a cheerless little laugh. "But there is something sinister in the faces of both man and wife that makes me fear them. The children—nine or ten of them, I believe—are good-natured, though; and about the only fun I have had is an occasional spell at minding 'Arybeller Mariar's youngest baby, which is the most comical little fellow you ever saw."

"The older of the boys—one they call Sampson Augustus—sometimes looks pityingly at me, too; and I fancy if the opportunity were given him, he might be induced to stand my friend; though he is terribly afraid of his father, who is simply an old ogre, without humanity or conscience."

And then Nettie burst into the first genuine girlish laugh she had yet indulged in.

"What preposterous names!" she exclaimed.

"There is another of the lad's whom they address as Napoleon Bismarck Frederick; one of the little girls rejoices in Sepharonia-Martha-Janette as a given name; and even the dear little baby is never spoken of or to by any of the family save as Roscoe-Washington-Cleveland-Alexander. Ha, ha, ha! It is too funny. And they always bring out the full string of names, without a break, even on the most trifling occasion."

Drusilla joined in the young girl's merriment, but quickly grew grave, saying:

"I rather think, from what you say, my dear Nettie, that Sampson Augustus will be most likely to receive my attentions."

"What can you mean?"

"My dear child, don't you perceive that my retreat is cut off? I shall never be able to make my way down the outside the house as I made my way up. The break in the line of pegs settles that question. I shall have to retrace my way down through the house, or not at all. Hence, it will be well to have a friend among the Alexanders, and Sampson Augustus seems the most promising, from what you tell me."

Nettie had also grown serious.

"You can never make your way down through the house," she said. "Of that I am satisfied."

"Why?"

"Even if not cut off, as we are, from the next floor below, by the absence of the ladder, the next floor under that is a kennel of watchdogs. I often hear them snarling and barking; and besides the amiable John Henry early impressed me with the statement that they were both numerous and dangerous. Then the floor below that is occupied by the Alexanders themselves, all more or less vigilant, while John Henry himself has his quarters in the sentry-box close by the stockaded entrance."

Miss Eggleston's face fell, but almost instantly lighted up afresh as her glance fell upon the couch, with its neat and ample drapery.

"Why, here we are," she exclaimed, springing up and stripping off a counterpane and a pair of sheets. "We are not above sixty feet from the ground. What is in the way of our tearing these things into strips and knotting them end to end, as a means of letting ourselves down from the window here?"

Nettie at once fell in with the notion, and clapped her hands.

"Why not?" she cried, running to one of her trunks, and beginning to pull out some of its contents. "See; here are a number of strong skirts which will piece out the bedding strips admirably."

"Splendid!" and Drusilla straightway began the work. "Moreover, we can let us down

from that slit-window by which you admitted me into the tower, and thus advantage ourselves of the line of pegs by which I made my way up the wall."

Both young women now set about putting their plan of escape into practice with much enthusiasm.

"Oh, I shall be free this very night, and in your company!" cried Nettie, fairly dancing with delight when the improvised rope was about completed. "I can scarcely realize it. It will be almost as good as owing my deliverance to Paul himself. Dear Drusilla! how handsome you are in your man's habit! It must depend upon this night whether you are surely to be my sister-in-law or not. Oh, I am so happy! Let us make the trial at once!" And she continued to flutter about the room in half-hysterical excitement.

Drusilla followed her movements with an odd little smile, and then burst out laughing.

"What an excitable little goose you are!" she remarked.

"Why?"

"Shall you really accompany me on this venture without dressing yourself, my dear?"

Nettie, who was still in her night-dress, blushed, stammered, and was all but overwhelmed, but her companion laughingly proceeded to assist her with her toilet, and a short time thereafter they were in readiness to essay their attempt.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DANGLING HOPES.

WHEN the improvised rope was at last made fast inside the loophole window, and let down outside along the line of projecting stakes, it was found to be short by a few feet; but this was not considered of much consequence.

The moon was now near to setting, and Nettie's chatelaine watch indicated four in the morning.

Everything was hushed below and around, and, as the line of descent was to one side, slightly shut off from the front of the tower and the dreaded sentry-box, the omens for success seemed highly propitious.

"I shall go first, being the heavier," said Drusilla, preparing to initiate the attempt. "It will be a good test of the rope's capacity."

"And perhaps a fatal one for you," whispered Nettie. "No; I, as being the lighter, should go first."

"You forget, my dear, that I shall have the pegs to fall back upon, in the event of the strain being too great. No, no; the chief question is, shall you be apt to grow dizzy in following my example?"

"I think not. In fact, I was a pretty good bird-nester when at school."

"I think you will do, my dear. Now, observe my movements, and be careful not to call out again, even in a whisper."

A moment later Drusilla was dangling down the side of the tower, Nettie watching her from the ledge above with much anxiety.

The former proceeded slowly, resting her weight at intervals on the projecting stakes.

All went swimmingly at first, but when a little more than half-way down there was a slight ripping sound, and the cord gave signs of tearing apart under the strain.

Drusilla, however, managed to relieve it of her weight altogether by stepping off upon one of the pegs.

From this position she could perceive the point of weakness, which was but a few yards above her head, and, climbing up another peg higher, she succeeded in strengthening the line by sacrificing a foot or two of its already sparse length.

Then she motioned to Nettie that the latter should avail herself of the cord, while her own efforts would thence be confined to the wooden supports.

Nettie accordingly grasped the knotted line with a strong grasp, and swung off from her lofty perch.

She was both light-built and muscular, and made good progress until opposite the stake on which Drusilla was seated, steadying the line.

But at this point her strength began to fail, and, without thought or warning, she swung herself over to the same support, and rested her weight upon it.

Drusilla cautioned her with a hoarse whisper and a terrified gesture, but it was too late.

"Back! back!" she warned. "Seize the rope again—grasp the knots with your knees! Don't you see—"

Here the support gave way with a crackling crash.

Both girls saved themselves—Drusilla by a well-poised drop to the next peg below, and Nettie by a timely repossession of the rope once more—but this was not done without the latter being startled into a slight scream.

Instantly the dogs within the walls, until then unheard, set up a most yelping din; and, a moment later, out popped the night-capped head of Alexander mere, with all the smaller Alexander woolly heads clustering around it; while a heavy, lumbering movement was heard in the sentry-box below.

"For de Lor!" squalled the woman; "a man

an' gal danglin' like grapes at de side ob de towahl! John Henry—John Henry Alexander! Come outen dat box dah! Hu! Miss Nettie am eeder hangin' hersel' or runnin' off wif a young man, I dunno which."

"Hu!" And by this time Alexander pere hove in sight, with an enormous cudgel in one hand and a ponderous horse-pistol in the other, with his yellowish-white eyes almost popping out of his head from under its tumbled, towseled thatch of wool. "Hu! But I see on han', Arrybeller-Mariar. Let loose dem pups, Sampson Augustus Alexander! Sepharonia Martha Janette, shet up Roscoe Washington Cleveland's squawk, or I'll bu'st dat crust o' yourn! Hu! hu!"

And he forthwith sprung to catch Nettie, who was by this time suspended near the bottom of the line, while Drusilla could scarcely refrain from laughing from her perch on the last peg down, notwithstanding her mortification and chagrin.

"Cease your ridiculous clamor, you old fool!" exclaimed Nettie, furiously, as she dropped to the ground, and waved the old negro back with sovereign disdain. "I'm still your wretched captive, I suppose; but don't you dare to lay your hand on me!"

Hero Drusilla likewise attained *terra firma*, but before she could produce her revolver she was roughly seized, and the young cannon of a horse-pistol clapped to her head, whereupon she again burst into her musical laugh.

"Why, bress me, eff it ain't anudder gal!" roared the negro. "Here, you Arrybeller-Mariar, stop dat kid's youpin', an' come down, come down! Bressed eff it ain't anudder young leddy!"

Then the entire family were on the ground, one after another, in every stage of *dishabille*, and the noise and confusion were correspondingly increased.

"Yes, you are right there, John Henry," said a fresh arrival, who had just stepped out of the adjoining forest. "It is another young lady—just the one I'm looking for at that. And it's a precious good thing for your old black hide, John Henry, that this escape is thus nipped in the bud. Back into the blockhouse with both of them! And look sharp, all of you! You'll have a caged pet of mine to look after now, no less than Fullhand's."

Drusilla had relieved herself of the negro's grasp, and was now, while supporting the terrified Nettie in the midst of the group, regarding the new-comer with supercilious dauntlessness and contempt.

"Why, it is really that low cur, Bricks Hitchcock, *alias* pretty much everything else!" she exclaimed, with pretended surprise. "Regard the fellow well, Nettie, for he is without his ruffianly mask now. You ought to remember him as Mr. Fullhand's fetch-and-carry in your mother's boarding-house. Though, to be sure, his face is scarcely the same since the thrashing Short-Stop has honored him with on the ball-ground. Come, my dear. It is obvious that we are somewhat *de trop* in this distinguished company."

Nettie, who was also a brave young woman, had caught something of her companion's spirit, and, as they passed of their own volition into the blockhouse (since further resistance was not to be thought of,) she even responded to the baby's outstretched hands, and bore him away with her out of his mother's arms.

Bricks had silently gritted his teeth, with a dangerous look kindling under his beetle brows.

"Pen them together in the one upper room!" he growled to John Henry, with an oath. "And see to it, you black lunkhead, that they're both there when Fullhand and I call here, later on, or it will be the worse for you!"

With that, he strode away.

But the day lengthened, and the slow hours passed over the young women's heads in the lofty prison-chamber, without either Fullhand or his henchman putting in an appearance.

"They won't come till after to-day's ball-match," said Drusilla at last. "That is doubtless their intention. Oh, if I might but confront the scoundrels on the ground, and then bring the whole brave nine triumphantly to your rescue, my dear Nettie!"

Before the latter could answer, there was a scratching sound at the bottom of the door (now kept locked on the outside), and Nettie peeped through a crack in it, while a cautious whisper reached them from without.

She lifted a joyful face.

"It is Sampson Augustus!" she exclaimed, under her breath. "And he is trying to pass in the key to us."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SAMPSON AUGUSTUS.

DRUSILLA's face also brightened up wonderfully on the instant.

The oldest Alexander lad, Sampson Augustus, a tough-built youth of twenty, had assisted his mother in fetching up breakfast and dinner to the prisoners, and Miss Eggleston, remembering what Nettie had said about his sympathetic disposition, had given him several eloquent and expressive glances behind the old woman's back; though she had scarcely hoped that they

would be productive of so early a response as was evidenced by his presence now in this endeavor to communicate with her companion and herself.

Presently the key, an odd-looking piece of crooked wire, was thrust under the door from without.

"Young ladies!" called out the colored friend in need, in a rasping whisper that would have discounted Tommy Dodd's stagiest and most tragic *aside*: "am you awake and respective to de words I is about to prooundrate?"

"Yes, yes!" was the double response; "thoroughly wide-awake, Sampson."

"Dat wiah am a skeleting key. It won't wuk on de lock outside beah, but may be made to wuk on dat side de doah. Young ladies, does yo' sagatiate my explornationum?"

"Yes, yes!" replied Drusilla, at once setting to work with the crooked wire. "Sampson, you are a dear, good, kind-hearted young man, and you shall have our heartfelt prayers for your kindness to us. Wait a minute—there!"

The lock had yielded at last, and, as the door was opened, Sampson Augustus was revealed on the threshold, with a great, fluffy bundle of something or other under his arm.

He was a good-looking young fellow, with an amiable, half-roguish expression, whose ruling trait, however, was that of inordinate self-consciousness.

He made his obeisance, and then stalked into the room with a stilted but feathery gait.

"Young ladies," he said, addressing himself more particularly to Miss Eggleston, "I've done gone into dis job lib or die, survive or perish, bu'st or rust, dance or kick!"

"Yes, yes!" And both clasped their hands delightedly. "How good of you! What have you got in that bundle? Can we both escape, or only one at a time?"

He besought silence with an impressive gesture.

"I done gone into dis job," he repeated, "wif my life in de holler ob my han'. Dat am de gospel troof, young ladies; for de ole man would jess skin me alive, an' pick out my bones for jackstraws, eff he s'pected dis t'ing. But I ain't a-lookin' fo' prayers, young ladies; an' prayers ain't de mouf-waterin' reward I se a-bull's-eyein' fur, fur all dat I se got a 'ligious streak in my compersitionum."

Not looking for prayers! Could it be possible that the colored hero was looking for kisses instead? Nettie was aghast with trepidation, while even Drusilla drew a long face.

"Not looking for prayers!" she falteringly echoed. "Still, you'll find us becomingly grateful for your kindness, Sampson Augustus. What is it you are hoping for as a reward," in a slightly tremulous tone, "let me ask?"

Sampson Augustus elevated himself on his toes, and reached out his disengaged hand and arm with a grandly-arching, world-grasping gesture.

"I want to rise in de wuhld!" he blurted out, ecstatically. "I want de oppawchunity to do somet'ing, to be somet'ing—to make my mabk on de niche ob Fame!"

And then he went on passionately to set forth his hard and obscure lot among the rest of the contented but groveling Alexanders, and to depict in yet more glowing detail the heights of aspiration that he was so desirous of clambering.

"You sha'n't be forgotten!" cried Nettie, sympathetically. "If I ever get back home again, I'll make mamma hire you for a man-of-all-work, or perhaps even to wait on the table."

The youth's eyes gleamed exultantly.

"Or, better than that," exclaimed Drusilla, "my brother Paul shall procure you a position as target-bearer for a rifle-company, or you might even go as man-in-waiting on our baseball team!"

Here the aspiring coon's eyes assumed saucer-like proportions, and he seemed with difficulty to abstain from executing a Guinea-Coast fandango of delight then and there.

"I shall rise in de wuhld!" he gasped. "I knowed it—I read it in de dictumary ob fate—my fortun' am in my han'! Here you is, ladies!"

He flung the folds of his bundle to the air, disclosing a greasy calico morning wrapper of voluminous proportions and astounding cut, with an enormous sun-bonnet to match.

"What is that?" demanded both girls in a breath.

"A disguise—mammy's Sunday-go-to-meetin' mawnin'-robe!" was the highly satisfied response. "Hurry up, young ladies! Big as it is, dere's only room for one in dat gabment. Mammy's now takin' her sighwester, de young 'uns am all playin' ketcher-tag in de back yahd, an' I done doubled dad's arter-dinnah whisky-dose, so's I 'spect he am in de abms ob Omnibus afore dis. But dah ain't no time to dissepate. Jess call me when you is ready fur de tempt. Dat young lady," indicating Drusilla, "wull make de bes' show in de guisin' dress, I 'spect."

But Drusilla, who had wonderingly caught up a portion of the remarkable garment in her hands, stopped him as he was modestly sidling out of the room.

"Wait, Sampson Augustus, wait!" she cried.

"This thing will never do. It is big enough around for half-a-dozen persons of my size."

"Can't help dat, mammy's a bu'stin' big woman, she am. You nought fill it cut wif pillers an' fadder-beds. I'll wait. No time to spa'. Hurry up!"

Then, as he finally effected his disappearance, Nettie, in spite of the seriousness of the occasion, threw herself on the bed, and laughed till she cried.

Drusilla joined in her mirth somewhat more moderately, but lost no time in investing herself with the preposterous disguise to the best of her ability, which is not saying much for the difficulties to be surmounted.

"That will do now, or it may be no laughing matter for you presently, Nettie," she commanded at last. "Come and assist me with this thing at once. Throw me those two pillows, to begin with; and you might as well pass along the bolster, too."

Nettie complied, and, notwithstanding the superlatively comical look gradually assumed by her friend as the Sunday-go-to-meetin' wrap and sun-bonnet took shape and filling-out somewhat in accordance with their original design, the risk about to be ventured was paramount in the minds of both.

"What is your plan?" she asked, while assisting at some of the finishing touches. "Tell me in as few words as you can."

"To discard all this incumbrance in the woods at the first opportunity," was the reply. "Then, under Sampson's guidance, I ought to reach the ball-ground inside of an hour, or, we will say, just in the middle of to-day's match-game."

"Ah! and then?"

"Can you ask, my poor dear? I shall instantly confront and accuse the pseudo Delancey and that freckled ruffian before them all. And how long after that before the nine avengers of the Owensburg team will be following me through the woods to your rescue? Hardly long enough, I fancy, for the tar-and-feathering of those infamous men, which will have to wait for our return."

Here the disguise was complete, and there came a timid but urgent knock on the door from Sampson Augustus.

There was a parting embrace and kiss, and then Drusilla was gone under the escort of the ambitious colored youth.

Nettie could scarcely find it in her heavy heart to give a laugh at the oddly caricatured figure of her disappearing friend, and then she rushed to the casement, to see how the pair would succeed in getting out of the block-house and past the open door and window of John Henry's sentry-box.

All went well until the latter test was reached, when the gigantic warder stuck a bare foot and sleep-touseled woolly head out of the sentry-door.

"Hyah, yo' Arrybeller Maria!" he called out drowsily; "whah yo' gwine wif dat bes' gown on! 'Splain yo'self, honey, or I'll cave in dem fat-upholstered ribs o' yourn!"

Tremblingly, Drusilla, while concealing the whiteness of her hands in the bagging sleeves of her disguise, pulled the sun-bonnet further over her face, and, grumbling something boarsely inaudible in reply, hurried on toward the friendly woods.

"Whah's de trouble wif yo', dad?" called back Sampson Augustus. "Can't mammy go a-brack-berryin' wif me, widout yo' interferenin'?" And he, too, hastened.

"Brack-berryin' at dis time o' year an' in dat bes' gown?" yelled John Henry, now suspiciously wide-awake. "Come back beah, yo' brack folks, o' I'll bu'st ebbery squar' inch o' yaller hide on you'm bodies! Stop, I say!"

And they heard him shuffle out of the box like an avalanche.

But by this time the forest-skirt was reached.

CHAPTER XXV.

DRUSILLA'S ESCAPE.

"HURRY up! Frow de dust in him eyes!" cried Sampson Augustus, lending his aid to his companion as soon as they were under cover. "Eff he only doan't let de dogs loose, we am O. K."

"But I really can't hurry up!" puffed Drusilla, fairly burdened down with her absurd disguise. "He—he suspects something wrong already, I fear. I—I must really rid myself of some—some of my *stuffing* before I can run!"

And here, as she floundered along, she began to tear out and shed her upholstery, so to speak, piece after piece, bit by bit.

But just then all doubts as to John Henry's suspicions and intentions were set to rest.

"Arrybeller Mariar, let loose dem houn's!" they heard him yell. "Napoleon Bismarck Frederick, foller me wif dat shotgun! Sepharonia Martha Janette, help yo' mammy to dress! Hu!"

And then they heard him plunging after them in the underwood, with a sort of husky roar, suggestive of a rhinoceros on the war-path.

But, somewhat with her companion fugitive's assistance, Drusilla was doing swift work with her hands, if not so much with her feet.

The sun-bonnet had been discarded almost at the outset.

Then followed a pillow, then the bolster, until the last vestige of her fraudulent plethora vanished into thin air, and finally she bounded out of the fluttering voluminousness of the preposterous gown itself, in all the freedom of her original masculinity, so to speak.

But all this had consumed time, and the ogre-like John Henry was already hard upon them, while Napoleon Bismarck Frederick was heard bringing up his rear with the dreaded artillery in demand.

"Hu!" howled the first-named. "Oh, but I'll make you-uns smoke! Sampson Augustus, count dem bones o' you'n inside dat brack hide, fo' I se get 'em bruk now!"

"Leab de ole map to me!" panted Sampson, paling somewhat, but keeping up his nerve. "You take keer ob Nappy Bismarck, fur he am de berry debbil, an' de ole man's pet, to boot."

Drusilla nodded and slowed up, while her companion, suddenly spinning in his tracks, lowered his head and darted into the fatherly stomach of John Henry with the force of an ancient battering-ram.

Simultaneously with this, while the chief pursuer doubled up and went down with a snort and a grunt, she drew her revolver, and discharged it over Napoleon Bismarck Frederick's head.

The latter howled, jumped high in the air as if mortally wounded, threw away the shot-gun, and dashed straight on through the forest, squalling shrilly at the top of his lungs until out of sight.

Drusilla snatched up the gun, discharged it in the air, and then broke the stock to pieces by dashing it against a tree; and meantime the bel-lowing and gasping John Henry's helplessness had been rendered complete by his hopeful son tangling him up, neck and heels, in the fluttering remains of Arrybeller Mariar's Sunday-go-to-meeting finery.

"Come!" cried Sampson, once more seizing Drusilla's arm, and they continued their flight together. "Don't yo' hear dem houn's? Howsomdever, leab 'em to me!"

Fifty paces further on, the hounds, four in number, with their terrible deep-mouthed bayings resounding through the wood, were at their very heels.

Drusilla, in common with the prevailing impression, had always associated blood-hounds with a deadly and awful significance beyond their deserts.

As the bayings increased in volume, and she looked back to perceive the red-tongued, open-jawed animals close at hand, she screamed, and rushed to a tree, where she clung, terrified and trembling, for support, half-expecting to feel their cruel fangs the next instant in her flesh.

But Sampson Augustus, doubtless with his plantation traditions in mind, was quite equal to the occasion.

Suddenly confronting the dogs, he lowered his head, placed his hands to his knees, and, imitating pretty faithfully the cry they were giving tongue to, leaped fearlessly straight in among them.*

The effect upon the dogs was both instantaneous and surprising.

After a moment's recoil, they circled bewilderedly around, and then began to fawn upon both fugitives and accept their caresses—though tremulously bestowed in Drusilla's case, as we may well believe.

"That will do!" said Sampson, at last; and the flight was resumed, somewhat more leisurely than at the outset, while the dogs, after following aimlessly for a while, dropped off, one by one, among the surrounding thickets.

"What's done become ob dat little debbil, Napoleon Bismarck Frederick?" he presently asked.

Drusilla explained the manner of the youth's evanishment, and expressed a fear lest he might precede their arrival at the ball-ground, and carry a warning of the wrath to come, or stored in keeping for Fullhand and Curveshot Balder.

"I done hope not," said Sampson, scratching his head. "I done hope dat dat brack little debbil, Napoleon Bismarck Frederick am too much ob a ijiot to tink out all dat wifout bein' primed."

However, he unfortunately proved to be mistaken.

The second match-game with the Hudson City team had just been concluded, with victory for the Owensburgers, when the fugitives, foot-sore, panting and streaming with perspiration, made their appearance.

"Here's Smithy!" shouted Tommy Dodd, tossing up his bat. "Hurrah! I told you she—he would turn up all right with care."

Drusilla had rushed in among the victorious College Nine, regardless of the spectators, and was already in the welcoming grasp of Short-Stop, Paul, Chris Payne and Mr. Barfield, who were grouped together.

"Fullhand—Delancey—Curveshot Balder!" were her first gasping words. "Seize them—arrest them! I have been with Miss Moore—

* A ruse more than once successfully practiced by fugitive slaves in the swamps of the Southwest in ante bellum days.—AUTHOR.

her rescue depends upon the instant arrest of those scoundrels! Where are they? I do not see them."

But both the men inquired for had suddenly quitted the grounds a few minutes previously, after receiving a whispered message from a small negro lad, breathless and covered with dust.

Drusilla, upon receiving this intimation, made a gesture of despair.

"Too late! baffled!" she cried. "Nettie will doubtless again be lost to us."

And then, in a few words, somewhat assisted by interjections from Sampson Augustus, she told of her adventure.

"We can't be too late!" cried Mr. Barfield. "Come along, all of you! I know the way to the block-house. To think of that having been the young lady's prison! Come on; we may yet be in time."

Short-Stop then took it upon himself to organize the rescuing party out of hand, while Drusilla, confided to the care of Miss Barfield, reluctantly resigned herself to being carried off for rest and refreshment, though she insisted on being still attended by Sampson Augustus, much to that faithful youth's delight.

Then a great shout went up from the grounds. The story of Drusilla's adventure, together with much that is signified in connection with the fair captive of the block-house tower, had gone abroad like wildfire. And as the college avengers rushed off into the woods under Mr. Barfield's guidance, they were accompanied by a large gathering of townspeople.

Too late! The block-house was found in flames, with scarcely a last lingering trace of its recent inmates, white or black.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

"I CAN'T and sha'n't believe it!" exclaimed Drusilla Eggleston, when the news of the non-success of the rescuing expedition was brought to her, late in the evening, at Mr. Barfield's. "Nettie gone—all the Alexanders gone—the block-house itself disappeared in smoke and flame! There wasn't time for such a thing, even with Fullhand and Bricks tenfold as desperate and energetic as they really are, impossible!"

But it was sorrowfully forced upon her by the chief actors in the attempted rescue, all of whom were present.

A little later Drusilla and Short-Stop were conferring apart from the rest.

Drusilla was now in her own proper character, looking her best in a charming but simple evening toilette, albeit there were indignant tears in her splendid eyes.

"What was the result of your interview with 'Mr. Delancey' at the Fullhand villa?" she asked.

"It amounted to nothing of importance," was the reply. "He seemed chiefly desirous of sounding me as to our future plans of pursuit."

"You did not unmask him then and there, or let him know the extent of your penetration?"

"No."

"And those mysterious shots from the shrubbery?"

"They were not repeated."

"Ah, of course not! since their perpetrator—the scoundrel Bricks, without a doubt—was at that time throttling Master Thespiano Dodd, and dragging him back through the wood, under the ridiculous impression that it was I once more within its clutches."

"That is about it."

"What did you think of my continued absence?"

"Tommy came back, with a rather confused account of his adventure, as we were about returning to Mr. Barfield's house. Your brother and Mr. Barfield were greatly alarmed over your mysterious disappearance, but I managed to quiet them with the assurance that you doubtless knew what you were about, and would take care of yourself."

"You really thought that?"

"Not exactly; but I let them think so."

A faint flush came into Drusilla's fair cheeks, and her eyes softened, though she went on firmly with her queries.

"Then Master Dodd could give you no idea of the block-house?"

"No; he was too confused for other than the most general description of his adventure. Had the block-house been so much as hinted at, Mr. Barfield's suspicions would have doubtless been aroused at once, as to the possibility of its being Miss Moore's prison-house, and we would have hastened to the rescue then and there."

"What do you think of what I have told you of my share in Nettie's captivity?"

"From other lips than yours, and without the charred remains of the block-house itself as corroboration, I should be tempted to set it down as a fiction of the imagination."

"It would, indeed, seem so. In fact, it seems more like a dream than reality, even to me, now that I look back upon it. How do you account for the evanishment of the tower's inmates in such surprisingly short order?"

"I don't attempt to account for it. Fullhand

and Bricks must have bestirred themselves with little less than supernatural activity directly on the heels of their brief warning, besides having facilities at their command of which we can have but slight conception. That is all that can be said."

"Public indignation must be furious against them hereabouts."

"It is. Miss Moore's misfortune, together with pretty much everything connected with it, is now common property. The scoundrels might have a taste of Lynch law, if caught."

"A regular hue and cry?"

"Yes. They advise me to put the matter in the hands of the authorities, but I tell them that our avengers will manage the affair in their own way."

"I am glad you stick to that. The law moves slowly, while we are independent, with not a flutter of red tape to trammel us, besides having Old Falcon for our mentor, leader and fountain-head."

"Thank you, Miss Eggleston; I shall do my best."

"Which will be equivalent to forty detective bests of the ordinary kind—more or less."

"You compliment me too highly."

"Not at all. What traces have Fullhand and Bricks left behind them here in the town?"

"Almost none worth mentioning. The villa is already hermetically sealed, with only a servant or two in charge, close-mouthed as the grave. Curveshot's belongings have mysteriously disappeared in his wake from the hotel where he was staying."

"So! then the remaining ball-matches are off at this point?"

"As a matter of course. Our rivals here are perfectly furious over the conduct of their late manager, and have eagerly consented to cancel the remaining games at my request."

"Whither do you incline to think Miss Moore has now been spirited away?"

"Southward along the river-line, if not into New York City itself."

"What shall be your next move?"

"I have already telegraphed for a match with a fine local team at Peekskill, where it is understood that Fullhand has another fine villa. An answer should come presently. The wild and picturesque scenery thereabouts would argue a second choice, on the master-scoundrel's part, for the concealment of his fair victim in that quarter."

"Good! Now tell me what you think of what Nettie told me as to Fullhand's notion of bringing his alleged kinswoman on the scene—meaning, most likely, the Vavassour woman?"

"Ah! my old acquaintance, Blonde Florine, that I told you of?"

"Yes."

"Let us wait. I may not have done with the Vavassour yet, and she may prove of more use to me than to the Zorilla Silver Mine president himself."

Here one of Mr. Barfield's servants entered the little parlor in which they were conferring, and, after saying that a strange lady visitor was in waiting for an interview, handed the detective a card.

The latter glanced at the address, passed it to Miss Eggleston, and made answer to the servant:

"The lady is in the reception-room, I presume. Say that Miss Eggleston and I will not keep her waiting."

The domestic retired.

Drusilla looked up with additional surprise. The card in her hand bore the address:

"MME. FLORINDA DE VAVASSOUR."

"An odd coincidence!" observed Short-Stop, smiling.

"Indeed it is. But why should I accompany you in the interview demanded?"

"I wish you to know the woman—perhaps for future reference."

"But will she not think it intrusive on my part, or—"

"Never mind what La Vavassour thinks, or leave it to me. Now, if you please, Miss Eggleston."

And the young lady was forthwith introduced to the visitor, with a few truthful remarks as to her interest in the leagued enterprise on foot.

"And now, my dear Florine," continued the detective, with his accustomed serenity, after the trio were comfortably grouped, seated, and in a measure *tete a tete*, "what can we do for you?"

The visitor had bit her lips resentfully—presumably at this familiarity of address in Miss Eggleston's presence.

Albeit in traveling dress, she was superbly attired with her accustomed expensiveness and fine taste.

"I wished to see you alone, Mr. Falconbridge," Madame Vavassour said, gently, but pointedly.

"And you can't have your wish, which is the end of the matter. Miss Eggleston is present at my special request. Are you here as friend or foe?"

Mrs. Vavassour elevated her handsome brows, for there was now a suggestion of peremptoriness in the detective's tone and manner.

CHAPTER XXVII.
BLONDE FLORINE.

"A FRIEND to you, as a matter of course, Old Falcon," Mrs. Vavassour nevertheless replied, with amiable promptitude. "Would I be so imprudent as to present myself here in any other character?"

"I should hope not," replied the detective. "But you are a bold woman, Blonde Florine."

"Why do you address me thus?" she demanded, at last thoroughly incensed. "Is it gentlemanly?"

"It is business."

"I shall have to beg you to explain yourself, sir."

"With pleasure. Miss Eggleston, together with the rest of my associates, is directly interested in tracking home certain crimes to this rascal, Fullhand, who is, or has been, your—shall I say husband, or confederate?"

"Both, if you choose."

"Good! Well, it is therefore necessary that a lady like Miss Eggleston should, under the circumstances, become acquainted with a—ah—person like yourself. Moreover, it is my wish. Are you satisfied?"

"More than that—charmed, delighted, transported, my dear major!" And the woman so far disguised her mortification as to make an ironically elaborate courtesy to Miss Eggleston, who was not without embarrassment on her part. "Ah! quite an unexpected pleasure, I am sure!"

"Enough of this!" And the detective made his abrupt gesture that could be so significant. "What do you know or hear of Fullhand?"

"That he would doubtless be mobbed, if at present in this town. It seems to be the only talk at the hotel, where I am newly arrived."

"You are not here, then, agreeably to some appointment with him?"

"I should say not!"

"For what purpose, then?"

"To confer with you."

"Ah! tired of Owensburg seclusion already, though you seemed over-anxious to retain it, *en caractere*, when last we met?"

"I was not tired of it. On the contrary, it agreed with me."

"But you were still the rich Madame Vavassour with Mrs. Moore's fashionable boarders?"

"Barring the wealth—yes."

"Oblige me by not being enigmatical, Florine."

"Explanations are easy. The largest bank check I had at my disposal proved to be worthless—no money in bank."

"Ah! and you had doubtless received it from Fullhand?"

"Yes." Her eyes snapped.

Short-Stop rubbed his hands.

"Well, Florine, and now whither away?"

"In the first place, to New York to pawn my jewels; though I have some money left—a bagatelle."

"Well, and after then?"

"Can you ask?" The gloved hands in her lap clinched suggestively. "When a man, who once professed to love and admire me, deliberately tries to compromise me with a worthless check, and then kidnaps a younger woman for his consolation, my thoughts are very forgiving, as a matter of course?"

"Pshaw! this won't do. You have been in money troubles time and time again, and Fullhand can't afford to break with you permanently."

"Your old distrust of me, eh?"

"Yes."

"Falconbridge, I hate that man enough to send him to the gallows, if in my power!"

"Words, words, words!" as Hamlet says."

"By Heaven, I'll prove it! or, at least, I want to, if you will let me. That is why I have followed you here for this interview. That, and one other embarrassment."

"What other?"

"I am without a maid—a deprivation I cannot accustom myself to."

"Style, or nothing, eh?"

"As you please. But spare me your sarcasm, I beg! My French hussy ran off with my best ear-rings this morning. The rat had doubtless deemed the ship to be sinking, or no longer seaworthy. Well, I am in hopes of supplying her place with some honest country miss from hereabouts, who at the same time shall be sufficiently sophisticated to dress my hair and not bore me with pronounced awkwardness. But all this is irrelative. Shall you trust me to co-operate? And, if so, what shall I do for you in New York?"

"Wait a bit. Miss Moore, though still in Fullhand's grasp, has been slightly 'interviewed.' He spoke to her once of companioning her captivity with an elegant woman of the world, a relative of his—evidently meaning the irreproachable Mrs. Vavassour—who, he was confident, would ultimately persuade the disconsolate child to become his bride, without any more nonsense."

Blonde Florine exhibited an astonishment that was either genuine, or a most adroit piece of acting.

"I understand your drift," she said, "but it should not bias you against me. Of course, he

could have referred solely to me—the impudent, confident, unconscionable villain! But—"

"Never mind going further. I'll absolve you from collusion in the matter, Florine."

"Thank you."

"And I shall trust you—at least to a certain extent."

"Still better!"

"Mr. Barfield, our host here, ought to be sufficiently well acquainted to know of some desirable young woman that you might give a trial to as the maid you require."

"Indeed, I hope so."

"It shall be attended to. Then you will go direct to New York."

"If you wish it."

"I do. Both President Fullhand and Secretary Moore are unaccountably absent at the same time from the Zorilla offices, or were so until very recently. Find out the cause of it, and report to me."

"I shall do it!" And Mrs. Vavassour prepared to rise, with a look of satisfaction.

"Wait! What were you intending to do, after your visit to New York?"

"To seek out Fullhand at Peekskill, where he has his finest country-house, that I am fortunately familiar with."

"Excellent! We likewise go to Peekskill from this place. Report to me at the best hotel there. One other thing. My curiosity is excited. How does Fullhand, even if richer than reputed, manage the expense of so many country seats?"

"I am glad to be able to explain. It is less expense to him than it appears. In addition to his other schemes, he is a cunning dabbler in real estate. These villas are either not his own at all, or only in part, and as the agent for their sale. His pretensions to proprietorship, and keeping them stocked with furniture, servants and the like, are but part and parcel of shrewd tactics to dispose of them for crack sums; and, to my own knowledge, he has already realized largely in this way."

"Good business-tact, that, and not so illegitimate either. Thanks! Good-evening, Florine."

She laughed.

"One minute now, on my account, Major Falconbridge, if you please. I also can be curious."

"That is but fair. What are you puzzled over?"

"Fullhand's desirousness to marry the young lady he has abducted."

"Ah! but is she not so attractive as is reported?"

"Pshaw! what of that? I have had good looks in my own day, but it was never those that magnetized Montague Fullhand to my side. I had a bonanza out of the old Lottery Fraud, of which you have some recollection." (With a defiant look at Miss Eggleston, who was maintaining a retired attitude). "And after he had spent that for me—spent it like a hurricane—I had money-making talents which he deigned to find useful."

"Well, that is it—the money."

"But Miss Moore's mother keeps a boarding-house."

"There is a fortune in the Zorilla belonging to them—an inheritance—if the worthy president and the mysterious secretary, Nettie's half-uncle, haven't already made way with it."

Mrs. Vavassour opened her eyes, and it was evident that she was enlightened.

"Pray do not forget to speak to the gentleman about a maid for me," she said, rising to go. "It is yet so early in the evening, I shall sit up for an hour or two, in the possibility of some one applying for the place to-night. I am really lost without my maid."

"It shall be attended to."

And then she had floated out of the room, with the air of a duchess, and just the barest recognition of Miss Eggleston's presence.

Then the servant entered with a telegram.

"The Peekskill team accepts," said the detective, scanning the dispatch, when the man had gone. "Pity you can't be present at the game or games we shall play them, Miss Eggleston."

She looked at him in surprise.

"But I shall be present, as a matter of course."

"Oh, no; just the contrary."

"But why not?"

"You will be Madame Vavassour's lady's maid."

And then he laughed at her blank amazement.

"Is that your new plan, then?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose it is a fine thing," good-humoredly. "And I suppose I must obey orders. Lucky, too, that my features were almost constantly in the deep shadow while she was here!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE AVENGERS AT PEEKSKILL.

It was toward the close of the second match-game with the Peekskill team, the first of which had been cleverly won by the Owensburgers, with a fresh victory in prospect, when Short-Stop Maje, in a momentary respite from ar-

duous and telling work, received a significant signal from Sampson Augustus Alexander, who had been duly taken in tow as a sort of traveling steward, *valet* in ordinary, or chief cook and bottle-washer of the touring College Nine.

Short-Stop responded with a gesture, and was then almost instantly merged, heart, hand, foot and brain, in the final struggle, which proved to be the rubber inning, with victory once more upon the visiting team's standard.

"You chaps are the Traveling Terrors!" cried the leader of the defeated nine, good-naturedly grasping Short-Stop's hand, in the customary burrushing that followed. "I shouldn't wonder if you'd next get a defi from some of the crack New York boys. It's a mighty poor chance we have with you."

"Don't forget the fighting chance left you for to-morrow," was the genial reply; and then the detective hurried away to join the negro lad.

The latter was vain as a Haytian brigadier, in a base-ball costume of bright red flannel, white belt, striped blue-and-white cap, and yellow-and-white checkered stockings (his own selection, and the donative gift of the college team, at Miss Eggleston's special request,) in which he moved, posed and scintillated here and there, much to his own gratification, and like an unique and most preposterous bird of an impossible feathered species.

"Madame Pompydore am at de hotel, yo' Honab," was Sampson Augustus's grandiloquent announcement, accompanied by a military salute such as was, for flourishing bombast, never seen before on land or sea.

"Vavassour, you probably mean," returned the detective, leading the way in the direction of the hotel.

"Dat's de cognomeron, boss," continued Sampson, striding grandly but respectfully at his side. "Mistah Dodd am doin' de honahs wif de ladies, boss."

"Ladies, eh?"

"Yes, boss; Madame Pompydore, an' de sweetest lady's-maid in all de lan' what all de time puts me in min' of somebody dat I kinder see'd befo', an' yet I can't say whar."

"That will do for the present, Sampson," and the latter was dismissed at the hotel door.

"I'm on de rise in de wuhld!" he guffawed to himself, while retracing his iridescent steps in the direction of the ball-ground. "I'm on de rise, shuh!"

A few minutes later, having changed his dress and made himself generally presentable (though not, as he had to acknowledge in secret, especially for the Vavassour's sake), the detective entered the parlor, in which Mr. Tommy Dodd was making himself agreeable to the lady and her new maid with a theatrical dignity that was all his own.

He quickly beat a retreat, however, on catching his principal's eye, and then, as Drusilla in her new character also disappeared with a demure air, business was on foot.

"Well?" demanded Short-Stop, abruptly.

Blonde Florine was looking at her best, but she knew better than to air her graces at this moment.

"I went to the Zorilla, with whose offices I am not unfamiliar," was her prompt response.

"It was in the morning, and President Fullhand was expecting a meeting of the Board of Directors. Went again in the afternoon. Fullhand had disappeared, and the secretary, Mr. Montgomery, who had been absent at my first visit, represented him."

"Always thus! One invisible, while the other is visible—never both seen together!"

"Are you sure as to that?"

"As to my own experience, yes. You must have frequently visited the offices in your time?"

"Naturally."

"And have you ever seen both president and secretary together?"

"Not that I recollect, now as I turn the matter over in my mind."

"Well," with a gesture dismissive of that branch of the subject, "what did you make out of Fullhand?"

"Five hundred dollars." With a slightly exultant flush.

"Ah!"

"Yes; as I didn't raise quite the row he had doubtless anticipated, he seemed disposed to generosity. Moreover, he had to buy back that bogus check he had given me."

"What did you make out of him in the other sense—as to Miss Moore's whereabouts?"

"Nothing."

"That wasn't much."

"Well, I didn't press him painfully on the point. And he seemed becomingly grateful on that account; and, moreover, there was a sort of lurking devil in his eye that deterred me."

"What impression did you obtain?"

"Merely that he now quits the city every evening—probably to come up here. At all events, his club and other city haunts seem to know him not of evenings any more than heretofore of late."

"So!"

"Yes; and Dorinda was of a like impression."

"Who the deuce is Dorinda?"

"My new maid. Didn't you notice her as she was quitting the room?"

"Not particularly."

"She's handsome enough, in all conscience, though, for a wonder, I'm not a particle jealous. I am indebted to Mr. Barfield's recommendation for such a treasure."

"Ah! you were looking for a new maid up there at Hudson?"

"Yes; and Dorinda Jones is just a gem. But she is a perfect lady, for all her rustic training, and I make more of a companion of her than a lady's-maid."

"So! Then Florinda accompanied you to the Zorilla?"

"Yes; or rather Dorinda did."

"Well, Fullhand's country house here seems to be wholly deserted; and neither he nor Bricks has put in an appearance at either of our games."

"That is hardly strange, considering the up-river row. However, Fullhand might be visiting his villa nightly, for all of its apparently deserted appearance. I know that house."

"Pay it a visit, then, this evening."

"Of course, directly after supper."

"However, I don't apprehend that he can have hidden Miss Moore away in the house."

"Hardly; but the grounds attached are rocky, wooded and wild, full of queer nooks."

"Well, make your visit this evening. I sha'n't be far away."

"That is settled. Are you beginning to have full confidence in me, Old Falcon?"

"Will let you know to-morrow."

"Still suspicious! However, how can I blame you? Wait!" as he rose to go. "A sudden idea strikes me, and, oddly enough, for the first time."

"What is it?"

"Might not Hitchcock-Bricks and the secretary of the Zorilla Company be one and the same? The man is better at character-acting and disguises than Fullhand himself."

Short-Stop thought a moment, and then slowly shook his head.

"I think not. However, the suggestion is worth second thoughts."

"Confess that it now occurs to you for the first time."

"I do that; the credit is with yourself, Belle Florine."

"No, it isn't by rights; but with my maid, Dorinda, who originated it."

"The deuce! I ought to know this Dorinda better. Suppose you send her to me."

"Certainly; and, as there is yet an hour to spare before supper, I shall, in the mean time, take a stroll in the direction of the villa. But you must promise not to fall in love with my new maid."

"My worst enemy has never charged me with susceptibility in that line."

Florine laughed as she withdrew, and presently, as the detective perceived her passing along the street from his station at the parlor window, he found himself alone with "Dorinda."

She was looking particularly charming in the mingled demureness and animation of her new character, with its jaunty little lace-cap and half-rustic dress, that was in excellent keeping with her dark and earnest beauty, and the detective was secretly much flattered by the shy anxiety for his approval with which she responded to his cautious greeting and accepted his outstretched hand.

"You are looking splendidly!" he exclaimed.

"Then I am out of character," replied Drusilla, smiling. "I should only be looking lady's-maidedly."

"Oh, but you are doing as well as you look; and no masquerading could bide your beauty, you know."

Drusilla had never seemed to like compliments, though she was not particularly displeased on this occasion.

"I have filled my new character to the best of my ability," she hastened to say, in a business-like tone; "and without my true character being suspected as yet."

"Listen." And the detective forthwith repeated the substance of Florine's report, almost verbatim. "How does that tally with the truth?"

"Perfectly. Everything has chanced just as she has said."

"Good! What do you think of the Vavassour, in a general way?"

"She has many amiable traits, though somewhat loose-principled. I like my mistress" (with a smile) "fairly well, though she is not the sort of woman with whom I could care to be intimate or sympathetic."

"Of course not; that stands to reason."

"Mrs. Vavassour treats me very kindly—so much so that I am sometimes ashamed of the deception I am practicing upon her."

"Oh, but no harm is intended her; besides, she ought to be used to that sort of thing. Her life has been one of make-believes and deceptions—an adventuress's career."

"That doesn't excuse double-dealing. I shall make up to her for it, when all shall have been explained."

Here there was a trembling knock on the door.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SCENT CAUGHT UP AGAIN.

As the detective opened the door Sampson Augustus presented himself, and in rather a comically pitiable plight.

He was as pale as his color would permit, his knees were knocking together, and all this, in conjunction with his kaleidoscopic costume, was both striking and incongruous.

"What the devil do you want?" demanded Short-Stop, seeing that the terrified lad seemed scarcely capable of speaking.

"Dat's it, Marse Short-Stop—de debbil!" he tremblingly ejaculated. "I done jess see'd him on de street! Oderwise, w'd I persume on follerin' yo' in froo de hotel? Not much, boss; not fur de biggest rise in de wubld dat ebber was!"

"You have just seen the devil on the street?" growled the detective, while Drusilla controlled her countenance with difficulty.

"Yas, Marse Short-Stop; it am de troof—de Gospel, hymn-book troof!"

"What sort of a devil?"

"De ole man—my ole dad, John Henry Alexander!" And then Sampson Augustus collapsed against the side of the door for support.

"Oho!"

And then, after the few particulars of John Henry's apparition had been evoked, Sampson was dismissed with instructions to keep out of range until after dark; and Tommy Dodd, on being summoned, was forthwith put on John Henry's trail, with orders to report progress at the earliest moment.

"This is good news," commented the detective, on returning to Drusilla in the parlor. "Where this old negro is, Miss Moore's new prison-house cannot be very far away."

"That is true," replied Miss Eggleston, at once greatly interested. "Oh, if we can only get on Nettie's track again, with so little delay."

"You will doubtless assist in the work, as before. But to return to our subject. What of Blonde Florine's intentions with regard to me?"

"I am quite certain that she means and wants to act in thorough good faith."

"But as to her pretended hatred for Fullhand?"

"That I would place less reliance upon."

"Ah, I thought so."

"She perhaps thinks she hates him, and wants to hate him; but I doubt if she ever forgets that she once loved him, and she perhaps loves him still."

"Ah, just the way with women!"

"I am afraid it is."

"But this is the question: Will her resentment extend to her co-operating with us against Fullhand?"

"As long as Miss Moore remains in his power, yes, undoubtedly."

"Well, that will be sufficient. You think I can then rely on her good faith?"

"To this extent, yes."

"Good! that will do."

"There is one thing, however, that you ought to know."

"I am duly expectant, Miss Eggleston."

"There is some sort of mystery in the Zorilla management, of which I am satisfied this woman knows more than she pretends."

"Ah! you refer to the company's president and secretary never being seen together?"

"Yes."

"Make yourself easy. Florine herself was honest enough to throw out a suggestion in that regard."

"What was it, please?"

"That the secretary and Bricks might be one and the same."

"Preposterous! That would not obviate the two officials being seen in each other's company. Besides, is there not a facial characteristic that could never be successfully counterfeited, to a woman's eyes, by the best of mimics, of which assuredly that coarse fellow, Bricks-Hitchcock-Baldwin-Balder-Curveshot, or whatever else he may call himself, is assuredly not one."

"I suppose so; and yet Florine's eyes are a woman's eyes, and it was she that offered the suggestion."

"A suggestion that she could not in reality entertain for a moment. That is the warning I would convey."

"Thank you. I begin to understand. She may know the real secret, and yet while honestly eager to assist us in Miss Moore's deliverance, be willing to mislead me in this one regard."

"Exactly."

"Ah! and she has enough lingering tenderness for Fullhand to keep a loophole for his escape after he shall have been deprived of the young girl whom she doubtless regards as her rival?"

"That is it, I think."

"Good! Not unpardonably woman-like; and we shall know just how far to trust La Belle Blonde Florine, and no further."

"Yes."

"Tell me your own impressions of this mysterious secretary, Nettie's half-uncle, Mr. Montgomery Moore."

"A blending of the bull, the tiger and the

fox, but completely masked to penetration by disheveled gray hair and beard, with the single exception of the eyes. Those are restless, cunning, steel-gray and voracious—much the same eyes as Fullhand's, but without the self-confident, ordinary good-nature in keeping with the latter's smooth-shaven *bonhomie* and sleekness. Otherwise, a shabbily-dressed, grim and secret old man, putting one in mind of the Wandering Jew."

"Aha! an excellent characterization, for I have had two or three glimpses of the old fellow myself."

"Wait! I have it now. Delancey! The secretary looks not unlike Fullhand in his Delancey personation."

"Better and better. He, that is, Fullhand, is a deep one. He doubtless modeled his disguise from the life-study."

"Yes."

"Well, we make some discoveries to-night. Isn't that the supper-bell?"

"It has an edible intonation," replied Drusilla with her smile, whose beauty no masquerading could wholly disguise.

"Yes; and here is the Vavassour returning from her reconnaissance. Let her lead in everything, and try to keep up the lady's-maid fiction till in your own judgment it can be of no more avail."

"Certainly."

Then Florine reappeared.

"I have reconnoitered the place," said she, without appearing to think anything of the time that "Dorinda" and the detective had evidently been conferring together. "Two or three of the house-rooms are occupied, in spite of the generally sealed-up appearance of everything. Of that I am satisfied. Come and make me ready for supper, Dorinda. I can see Mr. Falconbridge later on, and talk over a certain plan of mine."

The parlor was one room of a small suite that Mrs. Vavassour had engaged, and, as the detective took his departure, "Dorinda" followed her mistress with becoming demureness and alacrity into the adjoining rooms.

Short-Stop was on his way to the hotel supper-room, whence he could hear his rollicking baseball associates already at their knife-and-fork exercise, when a touch, together with a greeting at his elbow in a somewhat constrained voice, betrayed the unexpected presence of Mr. Barfield.

"Ah, you with us again, sir?" exclaimed the detective, with a somewhat forced heartiness. "Good, and welcome."

"Thank you!" responded the gentleman from Hudson City, still ill at ease. "Yes; I couldn't well resist following your team and rejoice over your victorious playing here. But—" He came to a dead stop.

"What is it, my friend?" and the detective led him a little apart. "You are seemingly out of sorts."

"Yes; a—something of a disappointment, I must say."

"What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing, perhaps. That is— Well, I have been here several hours. The fact is I got a glimpse of Miss Eggleston, and—and I don't exactly understand."

CHAPTER XXX.

A SURPRISED LADY'S-MAID.

THE Diamond Field Detective looked at Mr. Barfield keenly.

"What is it you don't understand?" he asked.

"Why, Miss Eggleston in the capacity of a lady's-maid—of another lady's domestic."

"Oh, you don't, eh?"

"No, sir!" more spiritedly.

"Well, you understood the young lady's masquerading in a perhaps yet more criticisable part up at Hudson, didn't you?"

"Yes; though I regretted the assumption of such a disguise by a person of her beauty and refinement."

"Oh, indeed! Well, just make up your mind that she has very good reasons of her own for the assumption of her present part, no less than for the former one. If you are still unsatisfied, sir," somewhat sarcastically, "you might apply for an explanation to the young lady herself, or perhaps to her brother."

He was turning brusquely away when Mr. Barfield, with a half-beseeching look, laid another restraining touch on his arm.

"Don't be impatient, my friend!" he pleaded.

"Oh, of course not!" the recollection of the gentleman's kindness and hospitality now making Short-Stop a little ashamed of himself.

"Forgive me, my friend."

"There is nothing to forgive, and it is perhaps my own fault. I shall explain my seeming obtrusiveness into the young lady's business."

"All right!"

"I love her," was the simple and manly explanation. "I love her, and intended to ask her to be my wife, if I shall ever feel," despondently, "that she is likely to give me encouragement."

"Oho!"

"Doesn't that explain my natural sensitive-

ness as to her—her assuming these strange masqueradings?"

Short-Stop scratched his head. Barfield would be a most eligible *parti* for a young woman of Drusilla's uncertain worldly prospects. There was no denying it. He was rich, refined, good-looking, not too old, a most amiable gentleman, and probably without a single bad habit or objectionable trait. What then was the occasion for this half-frightened, half-incensed feeling with which Short-Stop received the frank announcement of such a thing? However, there was something in Mr. Barfield's very trustfulness that appealed to his more generous instincts.

"I suppose it does," he answered, a little confusedly. "However, Barfield, that is a question wholly for your own consideration, and Miss Eggleston is a very independent young woman."

"How I wish one might read her heart!" exclaimed Barfield. "Oh, if I could only know how a proposal might strike her even now."

"Faint heart, and so on," replied the detective, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "But I am hungry, my dear sir."

"I think I'll defer this matter," muttered Mr. Barfield, faintly; and he followed the other into the dining-room.

Mrs. Vavassour and her "maid" were also there, though the latter (who had not been particularly noticed even by her brother, so perfectly had she accommodated herself to her new character), notwithstanding a searching look from the gentleman, gave not the slightest indication of having ever seen him before.

Mrs. Vavassour had said just before quitting her rooms, attended by her companion:

"Dorinda, my dear, you will take supper at my side this evening, and after that I shall have a confidential announcement to make that may somewhat surprise you."

The surprise came forthwith as soon as they had returned to their quarters, and were once more alone.

"Wait here, Dorinda, my dear!"

And, leaving the maid considerably mystified in the little private parlor, Blonde Florine, who was an exceptionally tall, finely-formed woman, disappeared, with a stately sweep of her handsome skirts, into the adjoining dressing-room, in which her luggage had been bestowed, closing the door behind her.

While Dorinda was still wondering, the door was partly opened again, and she was both astonished and scandalized to hear a slight scuffle, and then a melodious, though decidedly masculine voice say in a soft, half-expostulating tone:

"Let me pass out this way, I tell you! Your maid, indeed! What sort of a lady's maid is it that cannot be entrusted with her mistress's love-affairs? Nonsense!"

And then, after another slight scuffling sound, the door opened wider, and an elegant, languid young gentleman, with a poetic blonde mustache, and dressed in the height of fashion, lounged carelessly into view.

"Well, 'pon honor!" he ejaculated, as if speaking to some one behind, and bestowing upon the amazed young girl an impudent stare of admiration through an eye-glass flirtingly adjusted with white, effeminate fingers blazing with rich rings; "no wonder you were averse to my meeting a new lady's-maid who is so much prettier than yourself, Flo! Gad! a gem, a new beauty, a marvel! Give me a kiss, my dear!"

White, indignant and mortified, Drusilla had recoiled from his accompanying demonstration, as from an adder's threatening spring.

"How dare you, sir?" she exclaimed, furiously. "Here, madam, I want to see you. Pray consider my service at an end from this instant! No longer shall I associate with a lady of such—such extraordinary character for ten times the wages you offer!"

Darting to one side, she was about to dash into the dressing-room when a musical laugh—Blonde Florine's own laugh this time—burst from the exquisite's lips; and then she found herself summarily snatched into that fictitious individuals arms, and kissed right roundly, whether she would or not.

"What!" stammered Drusilla; "can I believe my senses? It is you—you yourself, Madame Vavassour?"

The latter—for the dandy was no other than she—threw herself back into a chair, and indulged her merriment unchecked.

"What! Miss Eggleston, you think no one an actress but yourself?" she cried at last. "Why, my dear young lady, you can be but at best an amateur, while I was a professional character in the London music halls before—well, before I was an adventuress at large, if you choose!"

Drusilla was still not a little bewildered.

"You—you know me, then?" she faltered.

"Ay, and have known you from the first. What! you forgot I had caught glimpses of you the few times you called on Nettie Moore at her mother's house? Or did you imagine you could delude eyes like mine with your mincing little lady's maid airs and graces? Ha, ha, ha! But was I to interfere with Old Falcon's test of my trustworthiness, especially as I was secure in the honesty of my intentions? Not I!"

"I can hardly realize it all," murmured Drusilla, not a little crestfallen in her own conceit.

"Dear me! I considered myself *au fait* in a masculine character, but I couldn't begin to rival you, ma'm."

"You must let me judge of that, my dear. Run now to your trunk, and trick yourself out to match me, for I doubt not you have the wherewithal thereto, and you must not forget that you are still in my service. Dispatch now, my dear! for I have a plan afoot that we shall lay together before the detective."

Drusilla, having now come to a cheerful acceptance of the changed situation, needed no second bidding.

She, in her turn, disappeared into the dressing-room, and Blonde Florine clapped her hands approvingly when she reappeared in the well-fitting male costume with which the reader is familiar.

"Capital!" cried Florine, enthusiastically. "We shall pair off well, you and I, my dear, and it shall be no fault of ours if we do not assist our detective friend to his desired ends. What is your name at present, my love?"

"Smith."

"And mine is Gonfalon—French still, or nothing, as you see."

"You are just splendid, Monsieur Gonfalon!" exclaimed the other, with unaffected admiration. "Do you know, I am ambitious of a stage career? And I wonder if you cannot at some time give me some points in that direction?"

"Can I not, Smithy, my boy? Well, just try me, that is all. There is a knock at the door, that ought to be our detective's."

Short-Stop came in, gave one glance at the double transformation that had been effected, and then laughed in some embarrassment.

"Think of it, Mr. Falconbridge!" cried Miss Eggleston. "I haven't imposed on her for a single moment. Our trick has been transparent to her from the very first."

"I might have divined its uselessness with a woman like you," grumbled the detective, with a half-resentful glance at Florine.

"Ah," she replied, with a dazzling twirl of the blonde mustache, and a complacent look down over her dandified shapeliness; "you had doubtless forgotten my character-singing days in London."

"No, I hadn't," he candidly admitted, "though I was stupid enough to imagine you gullible."

Florine languidly rose, signed Drusilla to stand up beside her, and struck a match for the cigarette she had placed between her lips.

"How do we compare for a couple of prime swells?" she demanded.

He smiled approvingly, though secretly certain that the advantage was assuredly with Drusilla, who, though the shorter, more robust and less experienced, to say nothing of her youth, seemed to carry her masculinity, so to speak, with a less conscious grace and assurance than her companion, who, however, naturally had the details of her characterization more thoroughly in hand.

"Admirable, both," he commented, discreetly.

"Well, what do you propose?"

"Dusk has already fallen, eh?" asked the pseudo Gonfalon, to whom the query had been particularly addressed.

"Yes; with a clear sky, and good moonlight in half an hour."

"Nothing could be better. What have you done so far?"

"Paul Eggleston, Chris Payne, and Tommy Dodd are already posted at the Fullhand grounds. Barfield would also have gone, but I didn't see the necessity of it."

"I am glad of that," interposed Drusilla, eagerly.

"Why?"

"Well," somewhat confusedly, "one doesn't want to be criticised by *everybody* while—while unsexing oneself, so to speak."

CHAPTER XXXI. ADVENTURE.

THE detective bit his lip.

Why should Miss Eggleston be so much more sensitive of Mr. Barfield's criticism than of his, unless she was beginning to have a tender regard for the former?

"No woman unsexes herself when doing her duty," he replied, quickly. "However, I have first to tell you that your whilom negro jailer has been seen on the street here to-day. But what am I thinking of? You also were a witness of our kaleidoscopic Sampson Augustus's supreme terror in imparting the information."

"Yes."

"Well, now then," to Florine, "what is your individual plan?"

"To boldly present myself at the villa, with my friend Smith here, and insist on conferring with Fullhand in regard to a contemplated investment in Zorilla mining-stock."

"But the house, you say, is virtually closed."

"We shall make ourselves heard by those who I am satisfied are within. Leave that to me."

"Will Fullhand bite at the bait, if there?"

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"But don't you fear that he will recognize your identity?"

"No."

"Still, he first made your acquaintance when you were singing in character on the London concert boards?"

"True; but I have absolutely nonplused him a hundred times since for mere amusement. I have no fear of his penetration."

"Good, then! But wait. You, Miss Eggleston, though I perceive you have made some changes in your disguise, might still be recognized as Miss Moore's tower companion by John Henry Alexander, should he be on hand, as he is quite likely to be."

Drusilla threw a glance down over her attractive, albeit somewhat foppish, person.

"I think I am pretty safe from recognition," she replied. "My coat and hat are both different, and you will perceive that my mustache is darker than originally."

"Well," once more to Florine, "after you shall have obtained access to Fullhand, as we shall presume?"

"If we are discovered or in any other danger, a scream from me shall be our notification to you gentlemen outside."

"Well?"

"And if all goes well, I might easily pretend to desire the purchase of the premises, in addition to my other pretensions, and then demand to be conducted through their secret underground passages, out of antiquarian curiosity, and thus get track of the young lady's new prison-house."

"Underground passages!" repeated the detective, in surprise.

"Yes; I believe I intimated a partial familiarity with the premises?"

"You did."

"Well, the nucleus of the villa is an old stone-walled Revolutionary mansion reconstructed. It was once inhabited by an influential Tory family, in secret communication with the British forces, and with the traitor Benedict Arnold, while the latter was hatching his treasonable plot for the surrender of West Point."

"Oho!"

"Yes; and Fullhand's servants used to whisper strange stories of Tory ghosts, patriot phantoms and haunted secret passages, in connection with the house, that I felt sure must have some foundation in fact—the passages, I mean, as a matter of course, for ghost-belief is not one of my soft spots. See?"

"I do see; and this is certainly a revelation worth knowing. Why, we may be already much nearer Miss Moore's deliverance than I could have had any idea of."

"Shall we go now?"

"Yes; and Sampson Augustus shall attend us. But yet a moment. Are you young gentlemen armed?"

"I have still my revolver," replied 'Smith,' composedly.

"And I am seldom, if ever without this," responded Gonfalon, smilingly displaying a slender but effective-looking dagger, which she as suddenly slipped out of sight.

"*Allons donc!* as the French say."

They quitted the hotel without exciting comment, and went up the village main street, through the thickening twilight, closely followed by the brightly costumed Sampson Augustus; whom a few words of stern warning on the part of Short-Stop had induced to conceal at least the excessive manifestation of his fear, though it was easy to perceive that he was in constant dread of encountering his dread parent.

On reaching the top of the steep street, they turned southward along the road running parallel with the river, at the end of which, surrounded by spacious picturesque grounds, stood the villa that was the objective point in view.

A small, deserted gate-house was at the head of the broad, short drive, now beginning to stand out distinctly in the rays of the newly-risen moon.

At this point Sampson's knees began to knock together afresh.

"Lo! bress us!" he chattered; "I know dis place—I've been heah befo'. My ole dad, he catch me now, shuah!"

"Why, Sampson Augustus, I'm ashamed of you!" said Drusilla, who had of course become again familiar to the fear-smitten youth's eyes. "You were not such a craven when you were helping me to escape from the block-house."

"I know dat, marse, but—den we, our fambly lib heah befo'. We tuk keer ob de place fur Marse Fullhand las' winter, an' it am jess jammed wif gicsts, tigger dan sardines in a box, halls, rooms, culby-holes, secret passurges an' all."

This was news even to Florine—the fact of the Alexanders having taken care of the premises—and the detective signed his companions to permit him to do the talking.

"So, you are somewhat familiar with this place, Sampson?"

"Yes, sah."

"And do you think your family came here after deserting the block-house so hurriedly?"

"Yes, sah."

"Would your family recognize you in your present changed condition, think you?"

"De ole debbil, John Henry, he would, I reckon," with a shudder.

"But would your mother and the rest?"

"I done reckon not, boss," with an admiring glance down over his preposterous costume. "Not in dis highfalutin' transfummentation, boss; not since I tuk dat big rise in de wubld."

"Good! Now, young man, do you just do precisely as I recommend, or you'll experience a sudden rise in the air from behind quite equal to any elevation in your prospects that you can well imagine. Understand?"

There was a quiet intensity in the detective's voice and manner that was sufficiently significant.

"Yes, boss."

At this juncture the group was silently joined by Paul Eggleston and his companion scouts, who had explored the surrounding grounds without effecting any discovery.

Still addressing the young colored individual, Short-Stop pointed out a narrow footpath running parallel with the driveway toward the silent house, partly disclosed in the moonlight, but heavily flushed at one side by thick shrubbery.

"Pursue that path now alone, and in silence, till you reach the house!" he commanded, in his low, stern voice.

"Oh, boss! fore de Lord, I dassent. De ghosts, de debbil, de ole man hisself—"

"Silence, and obey!"

Sampson Augustus hesitated, braced himself up, and then, with a last but ineffectually appealing look, advanced along the path.

Then he seemed to gather courage, with each step being accompanied by immunity from harm, and he proceeded with increasing confidence, that soon became a stilted swagger (doubtless solely intent on a fresh 'rise in de wubld'), his garmental gorgeousness fairly scintillating in the moonlight.

When two-thirds of the distance was accomplished, however, a gigantic black hand, forthstretched from the shrubbery, suddenly descended on his dancing crest with extinguishing effect, a hoarse, croaking voice exclaimed:

"Hu! I'se got yer ag'in, yo' ongrateful, dis-respectable brack nigger!" and, with a collapsing sort of squeal and wriggle, he was in the powerful grasp of the dreaded John Henry Alexander.

The detective made a significant sign, and, followed by his companions, rushed silently forward.

There was a crashing blow, just one, and then the gigantic *pater familias* was prostrate, bound, gagged and helpless.

"I thought the bright bait would catch on," muttered Short-Stop. "Quick!" with an expressive gesture.

Then the old darky was tossed to one side, the majority of the group melted off into the shadows, and, attended by the now grinning Sampson Augustus, Florine and Drusilla proceeded directly to the house-entrance, and pulled the bell.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MYSTERIOUS VILLA.

THE door-bell could be heard ringing, with a strangely hollow and a suggestively deserted peal, through the silent house, but giving back no answer, save its own sad echoes.

However, the summons was repeated again and again, and at last an approaching light from the interior was signaled.

Then a cautious, shuffling step was made out, and presently a gruff, wheezy voice called out through the heavy door:

"Who's dat, whar yo' come from, and what you want?"

Florine signed to Sampson Augustus, and whispered something, whereupon he called out, enthusiastically:

"It's me, mammy, it's me! Bress de Lord! don't yo' recognize your own prodigal's return to de buzzom ob de sheep-fol', mammy?"

"Bress de Lor'!" and there came the welcome sound of shooting bolts and rattling chains. "Am it yo' yo'self, my Sampson, my eldes' bohn? Come to yo' mudder's tress'!"

And, as the door flew open, the prodigal was folded in his mammy's capacious arms.

There was a series of osculatory sounds of exaggerated character, intermingled with fresh tenderesses of expression, and then the old woman, having set down her lantern, held her erring wanderer at arm's-length, while interrogating the visitors with suspicious looks.

"Who am dese fine gemmen, Sammy?" she demanded.

"Dey am Marse Gornfalleron, my new marter, mammy, an' his frien', Marse Smith," responded Sampson Augustus, with cheerful mendacity. "I'se tuk a big rise in de wubld, mammy, an' dese rich gemmens am 'sponsible fur dat rise. Doan't I look sweet, mammy?"

"Fore de Lor', like a two legged rainbow, Sammy! I'se proud ob you, honey, but, bress us an' save us! off John Henry Alexander cotch yo' ag'in, he skin de brack hide offen yo', Sammy!"

"Mebbe he won't cotch on, mammy. Mebbe he done gib hisself a sort ob rest. Dese gemmen dey want to see Marse Fullhan' on big business, mammy."

"Marse Fullhan' can't be see'd—doan't yer know Marse Fullhan' ain't heah, honey?"

"No; but I done 'spect he ain't nowhar else, mammy."

Here Monsieur Gonfalon gravely interposed, and stated the anticipated business with Mr. Fullhand in the blandest and most seductive tones.

"I'se purty shuah Marse Fullhan' can't be into de house," responded Arrybeller Mariar, filling up the doorway with her corpulence while wisely scratching her woolly head beneath its flaming-red bandana. "Still, a might hunt aroun', yo' know. What mought your business be wif Marse Fullhan'?"

"We are thinking of investing money to a large amount in his mining business," replied Florine, carelessly. "And we might also like to look over this interesting old mansion, with a possibility of buying it. It is a pity if Mr. Fullhand is not in, for as we are merely passing through the country on a pleasuring tour, we may not be able to call again. However, present him our regrets, please. Come, Smith, we might as well be going. Sampson, attend us."

"Now, hold on, gemmans!" cried the old woman. "Dough I'se pooty shuah Marse Fullhan' can't be in, still I mought hunt aroun', an'—"

"Let the gentlemen enter, aunty!" called out a voice from somewhere back in the cavernous darkness. "I'm always to be seen on business of importance."

The visitors were at once admitted, the door being carefully secured behind them, and, after being conducted through several passages, they at last found themselves in a richly furnished interior room, close-shuttered, brightly lighted, and ventilated by a great open skylight, where Fullhand and Bricks were discussing wine and cigars over a table, suggestive of hastily removed playing-cards and perhaps more pronounced gambling indications.

Mr. Fullhand received his visitors with his customary urbanity, the necessary introductions followed, and then, after the fictitious Gonfalon had somewhat enlarged in carelessly tempting terms on the object of the intrusion, he went on to be hospitable and explain the closeness of his seclusion from the world.

"You see, I come up here solely to get rid of harassing business cares," said Mr. Fullhand, smiling. "And I have to protect myself from being overrun by them here in my country retreat at any cost. But in case of anything very special seeking me out, I can mostly be found when wanted. Take seats and make yourselves thoroughly at home, gentlemen. Here are cigars, and you must join us in some wine. Aunty, more glasses!"

In a few minutes everything was hospitably arranged, and the two scoundrels were alone with their visitors in their luxurious den.

"Gonfalon" had turned the conversation very artfully upon the subject of the house itself, while "Smith," on the lookout for Bricks's possible penetrativeness, had kept modestly in the background.

"I have long wanted to possess some such old house as this, with genuine Revolutionary associations, as I have been given to understand," drawled the former, after some preliminary talk, toying with an empty wine-glass, and seeming to enjoy a newly-lighted cigarette.

"In fact, money is no object to me when I have such a fad on the brain. What are the qualifications of these premises, and what would you be willing to sell for? I have the best of New York recommendations, and always do a cash business."

Not only letters were displayed, but also, as if with careless inadvertence, and much to "Smith's" secret astonishment, several pocket-books, apparently stuffed to bursting with greenbacks of large denominations.

Fullhand's eyes sparkled, and Bricks instinctively hitched his chair a little closer to the table.

"This is a fine old country place," cried the former, beamingly, "and will doubtless fill the bill of your requirements, Mr. Gonfalon. The fact is, I am not so much the actual owner as the agent for its sale, at my own discretion, and I honestly think you can strike a good bargain right here."

"What size are the grounds?"

"Thirty acres, including everything picturesque, useful and lovely, and running down to the river's edge."

"Out-buildings?"

"Numerous, and first-class. Stables, coach-house, ice-house, bins, apple-cellars, tenant-house for servant's family—all first-class, in tip-top condition and apple-pie order."

"This mansion itself?"

"A glorious old place, in thorough repair. Roomy, convenient, even elegant. Will show you all over it."

"Presently. And how about the historical associations?"

"First-class, bang-up, fully authenticated!"

"Can't be beat!" chimed in Bricks.

"This is interesting!" exclaimed Gonfalon, greatly interested. "My ancestors were Huguenots, and not a few of them fought and bled. Place said to be haunted, eh?"

"Well, ur—"

"I'm rather fond of ghosts, you see—of the revolutionary sort."

"Just the spot for 'em!"

"Thicker'n flies!" seconded Bricks, treating himself to a lone drink.

"Yes, yes! Ghosts? Oh, they swarm! Though, of course, being a matter-of-fact man, I'm willing to take hearsay for 'em."

"Not so fully authenticated as the more material associations, then?"

"Bless you, yes! Common servants can hardly be coaxed to sleep here any more. My nigger family, however, will vouch for the ghosts. Just wait till I summon in John Henry Alexander, as the daddy gorilla calls himself, and if you want eye-witness testimony to the ghostly existences—"

"Never mind. We'll accept the hearsay evidence. What do the historical features consist in?"

"Everything queer, spooky and outlandish. Deserted turrets, uncanny fire-places, secret stair-cases, false doorways, tapestried nooks—"

"Subterranean passages, underground tunnels, out-of-sight dungeons, mysterious connections!" struck in Bricks, appropriating a fresh cigar.

Mr. Fullhand frowned reprovingly.

"I'm doing this descriptive business, if you please, Mr. Hitchcock!—Yes," once more to the visitors; "just everything in the historical-associative line. The old duffer that originally lived here was up to all sorts of secret dealings with the red-coats, they say; and when the patriots at last tried to smoke him out he wasn't nowhere!"

"What?" exclaimed Gonfalon, now fairly flushed with enthusiasm.

"He'd vanished, my dear sir."

"Gone up with the smoke!" supplemented the irrepressible Bricks, grabbing the decanter absent-mindedly.

"Not so bad as that!" cried Fullhand, laughing good-humoredly, in spite of the addendum. "But they do say the old Tory got to the river, with his whole family, without once showing above ground, and so flitted away into the British lines by boat."

Gonfalon rose to his feet in a tremor of antiquarian excitement.

"What are your terms for the place, supposing all these things verifiable?"

"Eighteen thousand dollars; half cash, easy payments for the rest."

"Unincumbered?"

"Absolutely."

"Show us over the place instantly, secret passages in particular. Come, Smith! If I like the premises, Mr. Fullhand, you can have the papers made out for me to-morrow."

Fullhand's eyes had sparkled, and yet he seemed to hesitate.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EXPLORATIONS.

"WHAT are you hesitating for?" asked Bricks in a scarcely audible whisper, and without moving his lips. "We needn't take 'em toward the river."

Fullhand gave him an angry look, and then, after some reflection, glanced up at Gonfalon.

"Suppose you let me look over some of those letters you produced a few moments back," he rather timidly suggested. "Of course, I would not think of disputing your good faith, Mr. Gonfalon, and yet—"

"And yet business is business, as a matter of necessity!" smilingly supplemented the other.

And then, to Drusilla's renewed astonishment, the pocket-books and documents were again produced and banded over.

The latter consisted of cleverly-forged correspondence with bankers, railroad presidents, financial big-guns, and the like, whose preparation was subsequently explained with no little gusto by Florine, who, it seemed, was by no means masquerading as Monsieur Gonfalon for the first and only time.

Fullhand merely glanced at the contents of the letters with his experienced eye, and seemed to find them eminently satisfactory.

He returned them with an apology, and then suggested that the examination of the premises could be more conveniently made by daylight.

But the elegant and antiquarian Mr. Gonfalon was not to be turned aside a moment from his "fad."

"It's always now or never with me!" he cried, impatiently; and "Smith" had also peremptorily risen and taken up his bat. "Passages and stairways of a bygone day are more interesting by candle-light or moonlight. Strike me when hot, or run the risk of finding me irresponsible when cold."

"All right!" And Fullhand was on his feet. "Hitchcock, summon the old woman, or John Henry himself, as lantern-bearer—that is," sarcastically, "if you can divorce yourself from that decanter long enough to do it."

"Oh, give us a rest!" growled Bricks, going to the door, and bawling for lights, after unconcernedly putting away another drink.

"My boy Sampson, there, can also make himself useful," suggested Mr. Gonfalon, as Samp-

son Augustus put in a re-appearance along with girthy 'Arrybell Mariar.'

"Hallo!" cried Fullhand, surveying the youth with surprise, while Bricks also grinned. "Seems to me this young coon is familiar to me."

"I should say so," said Gonfalon, with a bored look. "I only picked him up a day or two ago, and he first suggested your ownership of the old house here."

"Humph! looks as if he'd been spilt into a pot of boiled rainbows."

"Ya-s! a trifle iridescent, to be sure."

"Do you always dress your body-servants in this variegated livery?"

"Not as a steady thing, and then only at their own request. The boy seems to have a weakness for crazy-quilt patterns, and he is not unamusing. That is"—with a yawn—"I found him so at first."

"I've done tuk a rise in de wuhld, Boss Fullhand!" exclaimed Sampson Augustus, with a proud grin, while his mother looked him over ecstatically. "De wuhld am all befo' me whar to choose." And he extended his hand with a clawing, ambitiously grasping movement.

Fullhand laughed amusedly, while Bricks fairly roared.

Then the explorations began, with proud mother and promising son as light-bearers.

The examination of the upper rooms and corridors of the rambling old house need not be described, though a fictitious interest therein was duly manifested by the visitors.

At last, after not a few secret crannies had been exposed to view, Mr. Fullhand, who was leading the investigation came to a pause before a piece of paneling in the grand old dining-room, at the side of a wide fire-place, which seemed to have been neglected for many years.

"You seem to have been interested so far, sir," said he to Gonfalon. "But what you have seen is commonplace, compared with the underground wonders of this quaint old place yet to be disclosed to you."

Gonfalon adjusted his eyeglasses, and put on a becomingly expectant air, which was reproduced by his friend 'Smith.'

Still Fullhand seemed to hesitate at the last moment.

"Where's John Henry?" he demanded, abruptly turning to Arabella Maria. "He should accompany us now."

"Fore de Lord, I doan't know, Marse Fullhand!" replied the old woman. "He ain't home yer, an' I done be 'stonished whar he can be."

"Drunk in the village, like as not! I'll break his head if it prove true! However, perhaps it won't matter."

He pressed his hand on the wall, seemingly without particularizing any spot.

Instantly the entire panel moved noiselessly to one side, revealing the head of a narrow staircase in the thickness of the wall.

"Strange as you may think it," observed Fullhand, "this stair has no communication with the cellars directly under the house. But let us descend."

He had also provided himself with a bright lantern, in addition to those carried by Sampson and his mother, and the party forthwith followed him down the steps, which were of stone, and slippery, apparently with the accumulated dampness of a generation or two.

At the bottom was a large rounded cellar-chamber, very deep, and showing four tunnel entrances branching off in as many different directions.

"Odd place this, eh?" cried Fullhand, somewhat exultantly. "How's this for a Revolutionary relic and Tory retreat, eh?"

"Superb!" cried Gonfalon, ecstatically. "Come on! I can scarcely contain myself with these curious explorations in prospect."

And, snatching Sampson's lantern from his hand, he moved impulsively into the passage that ought to lead directly toward the river.

"Hold!" cried Fullhand, with an oath, with his hand on Gonfalon's shoulder, while Bricks and Sampson's mother likewise had a startled look. "Not that way, if you please!"

Gonfalon appeared to be greatly astonished.

"Why, what's the difference which way we branch off?"

"Oh, not much, save that the tunnel in that direction is dangerous," replied Fullhand, in an evasive and milder tone. "Roof smashed in, and unsafe condition generally. Here you are!" And he piloted them in just the opposite direction.

As he did so, and Sampson resumed his lantern, Florine's hand secretly touched Drusilla's, and was answered by an intelligent pressure.

The subterranean passage they were pursuing was sufficiently interesting.

It was several hundred feet in length, abounded in numerous little chambers and side-cells, that might at one time have been temporarily occupied by fugitives from military pursuit, and ended in a tumble-down opening, partly blocked up, that had originally opened out on a rugged hillside, Arabella Maria averred, well out of the immediate house grounds.

And near this termination, too, there was a grated opening high up at one side of the tunnel, and partly covered up with earth, that also communicated with the open air.

"What was that for, I wonder?" demanded Florine, curiously.

"That's one of the eucher-bands I pass without looking at my hand," replied Fullhand, cheerfully. "Rum old place, though, ain't it? Let's go back and try another passage."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGE.

ON the way back Sampson Augustus, who was bringing up the rear at Drusilla's side, received from her a hint that he was fortunately intelligent enough to comprehend.

After that, his lantern having apparently gone out and persistently refused to be relighted, he found the opportunity to pass it into her custody, together with a bunch of matches.

As the passage branching off toward the river was interdicted, Florine, on returning to the starting-point, selected of the two remaining ones the one apparently leading off in the direction of the gate-house foundations, along the above-ground line of which Short-Stop and his fellow watchers might be most likely lurking in the possible expectation of a signal from her.

She accompanied her choice by a significant glance toward her fellow conspirator, and the investigation proceeded, but without Drusilla obtaining the coveted opportunity to drop out of notice, and then betake herself by stealth into the interdicted passage, which was now the secretly-understood objective point.

However, after this passage had been explored, and when the third was being entered, Drusilla, with Sampson's help, managed to lag considerably behind.

A moment later she had noiselessly retraced her steps, while Sampson jogged on after the main party, talking and laughing to himself aloud, to foster the impression that he was still companioned by Gonfalon's friend.

Drusilla, on her part, regained the starting-point, relighted the lantern, and then sped off into the depths of the forbidden tunnel, which, instead of being unsafe, proved to be in the very best condition of all.

As for Florine, now quite satisfied that the desired maneuver had been set in motion, she resolved to make the exploration of this third passage as prolonged and tedious as might be without exciting suspicion.

Fortune favored her in a measure, for the passage was in reality more interesting than either of its predecessors.

In the first place, there was quite a large connecting chamber, with the remains of an ancient fire-place, where Arabella Maria was garulously disposed to recount a ridiculous legend about some wounded Tory refugees having starved to death, after eating two or three of their companions, in which Gonfalon insisted upon the minutest details, much to the impatience and disgust of both Fullhand and Bricks.

Then there was a specially haunted cell, where the fat old woman was again led into expanding the wings of her imagination or mendacity to the explanation of the last and minutest blood-curdling detail.

Finally as much as twenty minutes had been consumed in reaching the extremity of the passage, without the absence of Smith having yet attracted attention.

This passage, like the first, terminated in a partly blocked-up mouth, doubtless opening out upon a slope, with the same attendant grating high up to one side of the interior.

At this point, to her great joy, Florine was quite sure she heard the indistinct murmur of outside voices, which, if she was not deceived, could only belong to the above-ground watchers in the near neighborhood.

Anxious to prolong Drusilla's immunity from pursuit to the last moment, she picked up a smooth, elongated stone from the ground, and pretended to examine it with extraordinary attention.

"A bone—perhaps a human bone!" she exclaimed. "Look! doubtless the relic of some poor hunted wretch who perished in this gloomy place more than a century ago."

They all crowded around her, with the single exception of Curveshot Balder, who—half-drunk at the outset, but now sobered, and with a cunning, suspicious expression—was studying her with a scrutiny she did not half-like.

"Bress us an' save us!" exclaimed Sampson Augustus, rolling up his eyes over the pretended relic. "Ghosts oughter be roun' dese diggin's, shuah as shootin'!"

"Lawk!" squawked his mother, in more real wonder than his; "a bone, a bone, a BONE! Look out for de cawpse den! Golly! but I'se skeered."

"It's nothing but a porous stone," said Fullhand, contemptuously. "There's another, and yet another, just like it."

"My dear sir, I must beg to differ with you!" cried 'Gonfalon,' argumentatively.

And he was going on to expatiate on the subject indefinitely when a sort of snort from Bricks interrupted the lecture and challenged the attention of all.

"Where's Mr. Smith—where's that other duck?" bellowed the fellow.

And then the absence of Florine's dapper companion was suddenly and pronouncedly noticed.

"The deuce!" cried Florine, in well affected astonishment; "why, where can Smith have gone? However, don't be alarmed. Ten to one he's slipped back into the main chamber, and thence back up into the house."

Fullhand had now likewise taken the alarm.

"What! back in that solid darkness, and alone?" he cried, pointing back into the passage. "Not much!"

"Oh, but Smith's an odd fish," persisted Florine. "It must be as I suggest."

"I'll skip back froo de tunnel, an' see," cried Sampson Augustus.

"No, you'll not!" roared Bricks, downing him by a fierce blow. "Treachery! Twenty to one Smith's a gal in disguise, and is off into the river passage! Treachery!" And, as Florine started back, pale but collected, a wipe of his brutal hand deprived her of her curling blonde moustache, which was the best feature of her disguise.

Here Fullhand uttered a frenzied oath, along with the exclamation, "Blonde Florine herself, by Jupiter!" and both he and Bricks sprung toward her, revolver in hand.

But Florine was possessed of a tigress's courage, with the activity of a pantheress.

She partly evaded them with a flying leap, conjoined with a cancan kick that knocked Bricks's revolver out of his hand and then made his chin staggeringly acquainted with the toe of a very prettily booted foot.

The next instant she had fastened her face to the grated opening, and let loose a tremendous, ear-splitting shriek such as would have discounted the champion steam-whistle of the universe, with a fog-horn or two thrown in.

She had not vaunted her lung power to Short-Stop without good cause.

Fullhand staggered back in a species of momentary daze; Bricks, holding his damaged chin in both hands, popped his eyes open as if boxed on the ear with an Indian club; and Mammy Alexander, who was helping her overthrow son to his feet, trembled all over like a mountain of black jelly, done up in calico, and shouted out, "Glory to Hebben in de Highest! who hit a wild-cat wif a bomb-shell!"

The scream had also been answered to by a shout, together with hurrying footsteps, from outside and above.

"To the river shore, some of you!" screamed Florine again, scarcely less loudly and piercingly. "But look out for me right here."

By this time she had taken advantage of the momentary panic by snatching Bricks's fallen pistol from the ground, with which she at once set up a reverberating fusillade, though aiming the discharges at the tunnel-roof; while Arabella Maria and Sampson Augustus began dodging about, and adding their frightened howls to the general din.

But by now Fullhand and Bricks had in some measure recovered themselves, and a shot from the former's pistol dashed the revolver out of Florine's hand, but without harming her in the least, and not until she had expended her last shot.

"Traitor!" roared Fullhand, and then he and Bricks once more precipitated themselves toward her.

But Florine at bay was not a woman to be despised.

"Stand off, on your lives!" she cried, coolly, planting her back against the half-filled-in opening, dagger in hand. "Montague Fullhand, you ought to know me by this time. Shoot me dead, if you please, but the first hand laid on me, its owner dies!"

But at this juncture Sampson Augustus, with unexpected spirit, suddenly lowered his head, and, dashing forward, battering-ram fashion, landed it in the hollow of Curveshot's back, and flooring him like a shot.

Then, as Bricks keeled over, the back of his red head doubled up Mammy Alexander, like a smashed feather-bed, and, in sprawling out with a species of explosive snort, she in her turn, with her fat arms going like the sails of a wind-mill, brought Fullhand such an inadvertent but sounding smack on the jaw that his pistol flew one way and his lantern another, while, in trying to recover himself, he planted his foot on Bricks's lantern with a crash.

Sampson extinguished the other one that Fullhand had dropped, and then, disregardful of his mother's squalls and the men's curses, was the next instant at the side of Florine, who was by this time more hilarious than desperate.

"Quick, ma'm," he whispered; "foller me froo dese loose rocks, an' we am free in anudder minute."

Florine followed as well as she could in the dense darkness that had shut down around them.

As she did so Fullhand was heard to shout out to his companion, with a storm of imprecations: "Back to the other passage, or Nettie escapes me!" after which there was a skurry of retreating footsteps in the solid gloom.

"Sampson Augustus Alexander, whar am yer?" cried Mammy Alexander's voice, in wheezy pitiableness. "What! yo' ongrat-ful

brack debbil, would yo' leab your own flesh an' blood to de mercy ob de ghostses?"

"Squat whar yo' am, mammy," was the response. "I'll tend to you presiminently. Now I'se takin' a new rise in de wuhld!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

DRUSILLA'S FRESH ADVENTURES.

SAMPSON AUGUSTUS did attend to his mother's extrication a few minutes later, after his fair companion and he had wriggled their way out of the tunnel-mouth, and into the arms of Short-Stop and Tommy Dodd.

These latter, indeed, assisted them not a little in their final extrication.

The others of the outside party, Paul Eggleston and Chris Payne, had hurried off to the river-front, in obedience to the warning screamed forth by Florine.

She now explained the details of the underground adventure in as few words as were possible.

"So far so good!" exclaimed Short-Stop, at once setting the example of effectually closing the mouth of the tunnel, after the trio had assisted Sampson Augustus in helping the still vociferating Arabella Maria out of the depths. "To work now! Like expedition must be made in closing up the two other tunnel-mouths, and then a couple of us can guard the house itself, while the rest can proceed to the river-front."

"Splendid!" cried Florine, while the work went on. "I regard the young lady as practically rescued already."

"I hope so; though much yet remains before us."

"You would also capture Fullhand himself, then?"

"Yes; and his fellow-scoundrel. They shall be handed over to the authorities without further delay."

Florine made no reply to this, though she slackened not in her share of the tunnel-closing business.

They were at work at the mouth of the third tunnel, which had been located with some little difficulty.

Mammy Alexander, who had been induced to assist in the work, perhaps without very clearly understanding what it was all about, was puffing herself atop of a stump overbrowsing the moonlighted spot where the others were filling in the rough aperture with fragments of rock and other debris.

Suddenly there was a demoniac "Hu!" sounded, and a gigantic figure charged the party from a neighboring cedar-clump, looking yet more colossal and formidable than the reality in the magnifying effects of the eerie and spectral moonlight.

Sampson Augustus uttered a yell of terror, and fell to his knees.

It was the Alexander *pater familias*, the dreaded John Henry himself, self-freed in some manner from his bonds and gag, heroically charging down on the workers with a roar like an avalanche on the jump, and waving over his head a bludgeon that appeared little less than a young tree, or the stub of a telegraph-pole.

Short-Stop and Florine burst into a laugh and Tommy Dodd tragically drew his revolver, as they stepped aside to avoid the enraged dandy's tornado-like rush, but a lucky chance intervened to dispose of the on-coming peril.

Sampson Augustus, still yelling for mercy, dodged the initial stroke of the Brobdingnagian cudgel, which then set the earth and stones flying as if from the effects of a newly-dropped aerolite, and then, diving forward in his terror, brought his favorite butting tactics to bear, once more landing his bullet head in the paternal stomach with telling effect.

With a final "Hu!" like the expiring wheeze of a bursted balloon, the giant went down to the bottom of the hillock in a confused heap, and at the same instant the hippopotamus bulkiness of Mammy Alexander, losing its equipoise on top of the overhanging stump, plumped down on the old fellow in a sitting posture, and with the force of a small earthquake.

It was a case of one person being "sat down upon" by another with a pronounced vengeance.

"Bress us an' sabe us!" squawked the old lady, while her human cushion squirmed and writhed ineffectually under her solidly-planted ponderosity, "ef it ain't de ole man hisself. Can't yo' keep quiet, John Henry Alexander, till I done catch my breff? Ef it hadn't been for dis squattin'-place, I mought hab done bruk ebbery bone in my skin."

"Stay where you am, mammy!" vociferated Sampson Augustus. "He won't fly away wif dat paper-weight onto his fruskinness."

"Away!" cried Short-Stop, sternly. "To the house, and then to the river-front!"

In the mean time Drusilla, having lighted her lantern and darted off into the depths of the interdicted passage, soon found that it was in good traveling order, though so steeply inclined downward as at first to render considerable caution necessary in making the exploration.

This she knew was because of the abrupt slope of the river-bank, and was thereat confirmed in her hope that Nettie's prison-house would be

found somewhere in the vicinity of the further end, though she anticipated the discovery of her absence from the exploring party almost any instant, and the consequent clamor of a pursuit.

But as the moments slipped by uninterruptedly she took fresh heart, and devoted herself wholly, body and spirit, to the task before her.

The passage was a very long one, but, after about the first hundred yards, the dip became less difficult, and at last straightened out almost to a dead level, where she could almost pursue her way at a run.

Presently a sound caught her attention that caused her to stop and listen.

The murmurous sweep of water, mingled with the more articulated sounds of it beating and lapping upon roots and stones!

An exultant feeling possessed her, and she hurried on.

The majestic river was at hand, and doubtless Nettie Moore's new prison-house could not be far distant.

A moment later, though, she came to another pause—this time one of no little perplexity.

At this one point one side and the roof of the passage had partly fallen in, leaving just room enough for her to slip past the obstructing fragments.

This she had done, and then turned back, with her lantern elevated, to perceive that yet another fragment of the roof was precariously retained from falling, and might be facilitated to that end on the spot, with the effect of thus closing up the passage completely.

Should she do this now, and thus effectually bar or greatly impede, any immediate pursuit that she was momentarily dreading?

This became the problem of the moment, that could not be lightly disposed of, for the fall of the rock would likewise cut off her return, in the event of there proving to be no point of egress ahead.

However, after an instant's reflection, she accepted the risk, and, setting down her lantern, forthwith began to hammer cautiously at the poised fragment with a long, spear-shaped stone she had selected from a medley of debris at her feet.

It was a harder and longer task than she had anticipated, but she persevered, and it was well that she did so.

Even while thus engaged, and after she had been effectually at work for twenty minutes or more, there came to her the sound of approaching steps from the opposite side of the obstruction, but, strange to say, no accompanying lantern-gleam.

However, her pursuers were at hand.

"Hark!" she heard Fullhand's voice say; "didn't you hear a picking sound just now?"

"Yes; and yonder's a streak of light!" called out Bricks's voice in response. "Hurry up, and have your revolver ready."

"Do you think I've forgotten it? The disguised girl must be murdered on the spot before she shall be permitted to communicate with my captive a second time."

Then nothing but the nearing, steadily nearing footsteps.

Drusilla was desperate, and moreover felt that she must be presenting a good target for a bullet, and yet she dared not extinguish her lantern.

Nevertheless, she did shove it somewhat to one side, and then, panting, raised the sharp stone for a last stroke at the friendly fragment overhead.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DRUSILLA'S ADVENTURE CONTINUED.

THE stroke fell, but ineffectually, and at this instant there was a shout from the darkness, a shot, and then a bullet whistled by the brave young woman's ear.

Drusilla dropped her improvised hammer despairingly, and then, stepping back a pace or two, set her teeth hard, and drew her revolver.

As she did so, there was a fresh shot, another exultant shout as the second bullet whizzed unpleasantly close to her head, and, with a storm of triumphant and double-shotted curses, her ruthless pursuers were almost upon her.

Suddenly a thought flashed upon her like a revelation.

Raising her revolver, she instantly fired, not at her pursuers, but at the jagged connection overhead which had so long defied her pickings and poundings with the pointed stone.

Success, and in the nick of time!

The overhanging fragment came down, with a great crash and a cloud of dust.

The narrow passage was effectually choked, and she was saved.

Breathing a prayer of thanksgiving, and wholly regardless of a torrent of oaths and execrations from her baffled enemies on the opposite side of the obstruction, Drusilla lost not a moment in snatching up the lantern, and hurrying on her way.

She was faint and weak at first, but her strength speedily returned to her, and her step was once more assured and confident.

There was a welcome white gleam in front at last.

It was the flash of moonlight on the broad, liquid bosom of the Hudson River!

Then she was out in the free, wide air, though only a narrow shelf of shingly beach, with the river in front and a sheer precipice behind.

Drusilla was at first disposed to give way to a feeling of dismay.

The shelf on which she stood, scarcely a dozen feet in breadth and less than a hundred in length, was evidently, barring the tunnel-communication, inaccessible save by water or by a rope-ladder, or something similar, let down from the brow of the precipice, fully a hundred feet or more overhead; and as yet there was nothing visible that could suggest the longed-for prison-house or secluded retreat of the abducted young lady.

However, she presently heard a familiar sound, as of a vessel rocking and dipping in the waves, and then perceived the stern of a light sail-boat, with a small skiff attached, disclosing itself now and then from the shelter of a deep cove, or rift in the cliff-face, at the end of the narrow beach.

Running thitherward, a close examination enabled her, much to her surprise and joy, to discover a stone boat-house, occupying the inner extremity of the cove, and built so flatly against the cliff, and of the same kind of rock composing the latter's natural formation, as to be doubtlessly hardly discernible, save at a very short distance from the shore.

It was two stories high, with every appearance of having long been uninhabited, and in some places the walls, though of heavy masonry, showed the crumbling effects of time and weather where the glancing moonlight slanted along their rugged and moss-grown grayness.

But nothing could have been better designed for secrecy and security, as, in addition to the hide-and-seek concealment of the spot, it was, save by water or a perilous descent from the crag-crest above, accessible only by the subterranean passage which Drusilla had, as she thought, effectually sealed up behind her.

After a moment's examination of the strange edifice, her heart leaped exultantly in her breast.

There were whole glass-panes in one of the river-fronting windows of the second story, which would argue the presence of an inmate; and here were the boats at hand with which a rescue might be speedily secured, with the preliminary steps thereto thoroughly taken and assured.

The lower story, however, consisted almost wholly of a water-arch, into which the sail-boat was partly thrusting its bowsprit; and with which Drusilla could perceive no communication to the rooms above.

But it required only a first glance at the situation for the resolute young woman to make up her mind.

In another moment she had collected in her hat some pebbles, and clambered to the uneasy deck of the little yacht, from which she straightway began to bombard the one whole window of the upper story of the boat-house, and at the same time to call out a summons for attention.

In a short time there was an exclamation from within, then a shuffling of steps, then a raising of the sash, and finally an appearance at the moonlighted window-opening.

Drusilla's heart sunk within her once again.

It was only the woolly head and dusky face of one of the minor Alexanders—of Sepharonia Martha Janette, to be more particular—and in her arms were the dumpling-form and chubby black face and staring round eyes making up the personality of that embryo flower of the flock and pink of Ethiopian babyhood, Roscoe Washington Cleveland Alexander.

"Fore de Lor", sah! what am de rumperous?" gasped Sepharonia, looking down upon the intruder and catching her breath.

"Oh, dear!" despairingly cried Drusilla, "are you, then, the only inmate of this place?"

"Wait! I—I am here!" screamed another voice, from behind. "Oh, Drusilla, dear Drusilla! is it, can it be you once more?"

And then Miss Moore, who had been doubtless cowering in bed until aroused to new hope by the accents of her friend's voice, was also at the window, her beautiful fair hair streaming down over her white-robed figure and her delighted face in striking contrast with the grinning black ones helping her to fill out the moon-lighted picture framed by the window-casing.

Drusilla could at first only utter an exclamation of joy in response.

"Oh, how happy I am!" continued Nettie, half in sobs. "I was afraid I should never see you again. How long have you been there? How did you reach this place? Where are you from? When shall you carry me away from this dreadful house? I can't come down to you; can you come up to me? Dear, darling Miss Eggleston! How shall you manage now? What shall I do?"

"One question at a time, Nettie!" cried Drusilla, laughing in spite of herself. "Better let me do the questioning at first, I think."

"All right! just as you choose! Oh, you darling!"

Here Sepharonia Martha Janette began to

guffaw in high glee, which was apparently a signal for Roscoe Washington Cleveland to express himself in a diametrically different spirit.

At all events the shining black rotundity of the little fellow's face suddenly wrinkled all over most astonishingly, and he forthwith set up an awful squalling, that was the reverse of musical, and caused Miss Moore an interruption of five minutes to coax and dandle into a state of renewed quiescence.

"Sepharonia is permitted to keep company with me here," Nettie found opportunity to call out jerkily to Drusilla while thus engaged, "and Mammy Alexander also allows me to have Roscoe with me a good part of the time. Isn't he a little dear?"

This was rather uncertainly assented to.

"The Avengers must have reached the block-house within two hours of my escape from it in Sampson's company," Drusilla called out, as Roscoe began to quiet down. "How did your captors manage to effect such a wholesale disappearance, and then fire the place in such short order?"

"I don't know. It all happened in a sort of dream. Fullhand and Bricks suddenly put in an appearance, looking stern and anxious. Ten minutes later, it seemed to me, the Alexanders were packed up and prepared to move off, which they at once did with a couple of wagons and some horses, which were produced from somewhere in the forest, as if by magic, together with a light top-wagon, attached to a fleet animal. Into this I was summarily hurried, along with Fullhand and Bricks and my trunks, in spite of my struggles and protests, and, as we drove away through the deep woods, I saw the block-house springing into flames.

"It was the chloroform again, I suppose. At all events I was suddenly seized by Fullhand, my head enveloped in a shawl, and I speedily lost consciousness.

"When I recovered, I was still their prisoner, but in that little vessel, instead of the carriage. Then they brought me here, and here have I been ever since."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SHORE SIDE CAPTIVE.

IN return for this brief account of Nettie's experience, Drusilla related in few words what had chanced with herself and the Avengers.

"Come now!" cried the latter at last. "Those villains may break through the obstruction in the underground passage at any moment; and I can't imagine what may have become of Florine, or what our friends in the house-grounds may be doing. You must lose no time in coming down here in this boat to me in some way."

"How I wish I could!" replied Nettie, returning Roscoe to Sepharonia's charge, and looking down doubtfully. "But it is very far down there."

"Not so very. In fact, I wonder at your not having made the attempt, unaided, long before this."

"You wouldn't have had me drop myself into the water, would you?"

"No, but here into the yacht's fore-castle—as I believe they call it."

"This is the first time the boat has been left so far inside the cove, or the attempt would have most likely suggested itself; though I know nothing about the management of a sail-boat."

"Neither do I," admitted Drusilla, the matter now occurring to her for the first time. "However, you must manage to get down here to me in some way, Nettie. There's the smaller boat, that might answer our purpose; and I once handled the oars a little, when on a visit to Chautauqua Lake."

"Oh, what shall I do?"

"Wait!" And then Drusilla managed to pull the yacht's bow closer in under the arch, so that the fore-deck was directly under the window. "How is that?"

But it was really a risky jump, the distance being all of twenty feet, and Nettie could still only clasp her hands despairingly.

There must be a staircase leading up to you from somewhere under the arch, isn't there?" Drusilla inquired, after a troubled pause.

"Yes; Fullhand makes use of it in making me his detestable, importunate visits; and that old ogre, John Henry, is also intrusted with a key to the door at the top of the steps. I am always kept locked in, however, and the door is as immovable as adamant."

"I have it," cried Drusilla. "You'll have to let yourself down by the bed-clothes, which we used to such good advantage at the block-house."

"There ain't any."

"No bed-clothes?"

"Not a stitch, save bare pillows and mattresses," and Nettie was half-laughing and half-crying while making the pitiable confession.

"How is that?"

"My captors have taken a lesson from my former attempt in your company, my dear. Since then Mammy Alexander has each evening brought me the drapery for my couch, remaining with me all night, and then taken them away with her in the morning. To-night, for some

reason or other, she failed to put in an appearance. The fact is, Sepharonia, Roscoe and I were trying to forget our miseries bunched together under a lot of my old skirts when your unexpected summons reached us."

"This is distressing!" exclaimed Drusilla, clinching her teeth.

Here there was a sort of revelational exclamation on the part of Sepharonia, who, with the quieted, but still wide-awake Roscoe clasped tightly to her juvenile bosom, had been gazing down at Drusilla, from her position at Nettie's side, with a species of frozen guffaw on her black, good-natured little face.

"I've got de ijear," she suddenly yelled. "I say, Mister Party Gal, in coat and trowser-legs."

"Well, my young friend?" was the not very hopeful response.

"Promise ter let me an' Roscoe go 'long, an' I'll tell yer how ter do it."

"That is as Miss Moore must decide," replied Drusilla. "Roscoe is a trifle young for unknown voyaging, it must be confessed."

"I shouldn't object, if it would only help us out of the difficulty," said Nettie. "We might find some means to send them back to Mammy Alexander, after securing our escape."

"Dat won't do!" decidedly interposed Sepharonia, who was a well-grown girl of fourteen, and seemed to have a spice of Sampson Augustus's vaulting ambition in her composition. "I've gwine fur good, ur I've not a-gwine ter go at all. I've done boun' ter see somefin' ob de big wuhld, I is!"

"Oh, dear!" cried Drusilla, with ill-restrained amusement. "Must you be taking a rise in the world, too?"

"You kin bet I mus', honey!" with an aspiring grin. "Oh, jess gib me de chance fur to light on de big wuhld, like a blue-bottle buzzer on top ob a maple-sugar chunk! I'll show dem white-folks what's what, honey!"

"But surely, Sephy," said Nettie, "you wouldn't deprive little Roscoe of his mammy?"

"Oh, no, miss! Send him back when you done please, but as fur me," with a sweeping, hungering gesture, "gib me de hull, big, boom-in', circumjumperin' Universerum!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Drusilla. "Bless me! you all but frighten me, Sepharonia. Well, we shall agree to your terms, and take you with us. Get dressed without delay, Nettie, and let us see what Sephy's great idea is."

Sepharonia also disappeared from the window, with a kind of whoop, as Nettie stepped back.

The next instant she was seen stuffing the mattress through the window with great enthusiasm, having meantime set the baby to one side.

They fell one on top of the other directly across the bows of the yacht.

The pillows and bolsters followed in quick succession, and were received by Drusilla, who now perceived the true inwardness of the new idea, and arranged them artistically on top the other articles, as if to prepare for a ground-and-lofty tumbling act.

When Nettie reappeared at the window fully dressed the ground-work for the impromptu performance was about complete.

"Look out fur de pieces!" cheerfully called out Sepharonia, tossing out Roscoe as a test-trial. "Dah yo' go!"

The dumpling-like youngster struck the pile fairly on his little posteriors, and gave a yell as he bounded up like an India rubber ball, but was deftly caught by Drusilla without suffering mishap.

Sepharonia hilariously followed to show the way, and landed similarly, with a grand bounce suggestive of something more than nature's bustle, and reaching her feet on the deck with quite a little flourish of her long beels.

"You' turn, Missus Nettie!" she called back encouragingly. "Yo' mus' fall squattin', dough, or oberboard yo' go, kersock!"

Nettie did make the jump, though a little more gracefully than advised, and got off with a slight sprain.

"Into the small boat now!" cried Drusilla. "I hear noises from the tunnel, no less than some others from the top of the cliff. Let us make haste!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A PERILOUS PREDICAMENT.

AFTER a good deal of trouble, the fugitives succeeded in crowding into the small boat.

Then the rope was cut, Drusilla pushed off, availing herself of the only pair of oars, which she could handle but indifferently, and some slight progress was made toward gaining more open water.

At this juncture, however, there were a couple of interruptions of a very diverse character.

"Stick to it!" shouted a well-known voice, from high overhead. "We'll find means to reach you in a short time."

It was Paul Eggleston's, and now they perceived him waving his hat from among a small group on the summit of the moon-silvered bluff.

Drusilla responded with a cheer, and Nettie could almost have cried with delighted excitement, while the irrepressible Sepharonia sent up

a shrill screech that might have been heard for a mile.

Then a man, who was recognized as Short-Stop Maje himself, was observed to run to the edge of the cliff, and wave his hand.

"Keep down the stream!" called out his clear, resonant voice. "There is a landing-place down there where we can receive you."

Drusilla made a glad gesture in response, and then recognized Florine, also beckoning encouragingly, with Chris Payne and the many-colored Sampson Augustus at her side.

And at that moment Sepharonia recognized the last mentioned individual at the same time.

"Glory Hallelujerum!" she squalled, tossing Roscoe so frantically in the air that there was imminent danger of his tumbling off into the river; "eff dere ain't our Sampsy 'Gustus, a-shinin' an' a-sparklin' like a dead fish in de moonshine! Oh, Laws a massy! but what a rise in de wuhld dat brack coon must hev took!"

"Be quiet, do!" commanded Drusilla, who was now doing her best to row as well as the crowded condition of the boat would admit, while the group on the bluff had scattered and disappeared. "We're not safe yet, and must devote ourselves only to the business in hand."

Here occurred the second interruption.

There was a tremendous explosion, apparently from the bosom of the tunnel, and its mouth, now directly opposite the boat's position, was seen to vomit forth a puff of smoke, together with a shower of stones.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Drusilla, the truth flashing upon her like a revelation; "those panned-up scoundrels! They must have blown out the obstructions with such powder as their pistol-cartridges would furnish, and even at the risk of blowing themselves up, into the bargain!"

The truth of this surmise was instantly apparent.

Quickly following the smoke-puff, two men were seen to rush out of the secret passage upon the moon-lighted strand.

Their powder-blackened faces did not prevent their instant recognition by both Drusilla and Nettie, as Fullhand and Bricks, even had the former's voice not established the fact beyond a doubt.

"To the sail-boat!" he was heard to shout, in a voice hoarse with baffled rage. "Quick! if that girl is torn from my grasp by the Diamond-Field Detective, I am a doomed man!"

And then they were seen to rush frantically for the yacht.

Drusilla maintained an outward calm that she was far from feeling in her heart, and busbanding her strength, she bent to the oars as methodically as her imperfect knowledge of rowing would allow, while heading out slantingly, so as to get the full force of the magnificent river's east shore-current at the earliest possible moment.

She could not deny to herself the imminent danger there was of recapture; and both Nettie and Sepharonia, as if reflecting her anxiety, had grown as still as death, even little Roscoe himself settling down into infantile apathy.

To spring on the yacht, cast off moorings, and shake out the sail, had been the work of but a minute or two on the part of the pursuers, who appeared to be thoroughly at home on the water.

The craft was only floating out with the tide at present, but a good down-stream wind would doubtless puff out her sail like a little balloon as soon as she should drift from under the deadening shelter of the rising bluff; and as it was fully half a mile down before a landing could be effected by the small boat containing the fugitives, there was the best sort of chance of their being overhauled.

"Oh!" sobbed Nettie at last, the tears streaming down her face, "why did we not think of scuttling or firing that hateful sail boat before shoving off? We might have done it without any sort of trouble whatever."

"It was a sad oversight on our part; but let us not despair," replied Drusilla, gravely. "It's no use deploring what can't be remedied, and we're not captured yet."

"But we must not be, Drusilla!" cried the young girl, clasping her hands frantically. "I feel that I would sooner die than be in that man's power again."

"It shall be neither the one nor the other, my dear, if I can help it," was the calmly-serious reply, with a suggestion of irony in it. "Take courage, and keep on a lookout far down along the bank there for the reappearance of our friends."

"There isn't a sign of them!" cried Nettie, desperately. "Besides, where would they get a boat to come off to our rescue?"

"No matter; we might go to them, if they could not come to us. See; the swift current already seizes our keel, and we are beginning to rush with it splendidly."

"Dat am de fac!" exclaimed Sepharonia, joyfully fetching a tighter clasp on Roscoe. "We am jess sliin' along like grease, while dat ole sail-boat bobs an' slouches about like a goose wif its tail gone."

"What is that speck seemingly making for us from far out in mid-stream?" demanded

Drusilla, without relinquishing her monotonous labor at the oars. "It seems too insignificant for a sail."

"It is one, however," said Nettie, after a moment's scrutiny of the object. "I can make it out now. It is the tiniest of sail-boats, and there is but one man in it, who seems to be waving his hand toward us."

Here there was a despairing wail from Sepharonia.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SAILS AGAINST OARS.

THERE was cause enough for that despairing cry, and as Drusilla and Nettie followed the glance that accompanied it back along the wake of the row-boat, the younger girl's heart grew hushed and choked with fresh dejection.

The wind had suddenly caught the drifting yacht, and with her one great leg-of-mutton sail swelling out like the snowy bosom of a mighty bird, she was now apparently bearing down upon the fugitives with almost the speed of an arrow.

Drusilla, on her part, merely calculated the interval to be overhauled as perhaps a little more than a quarter of a mile, and then pointed to an in-shore beach, a little less than twice the distance away, on which Short-Stop and his companions could now be seen gathered, but in evident embarrassment over a perfect comprehension of the criticalness of the situation, and the fact of there being no boat to be had.

Then she coolly stopped rowing, and shipped the sculls.

"Oh!" exclaimed Nettie, "what are you going to do?"

For immediate answer, Drusilla produced her revolver, which had been emptied in the tunnel and elsewhere, and began supplying it with fresh cartridges.

"Oars are of little use as against sails when the wind blows," she said, quietly. "We must trust in something else and—wait."

Sepharonia screamed, and buried her face in the fat little baby's body.

Nettie, however, now seemed to catch a little of her friend's heroic spirit, and forced herself to be calm for the worst.

"I wish I had a weapon, too!" she said, simply. "I never, to my recollection, discharged a firearm in my life; but, if I could sight and touch off a whole cannon now, I feel certain I would blow that yacht out of water, and its cowardly inmates into atoms."

Drusilla smiled approvingly, and then glanced from the on-swooping yacht to the tiny sail-boat from mid-stream, which was now quite distinct.

"We shall be overhauled in just about five minutes," she observed. "In the mean time, I recognize the man in the tiny sail-boat, and rather think he is desirous of assisting us."

"You know him?" exclaimed Nettie, in surprise.

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"A Mr. Barfield," and the olive pallor of Drusilla's face was suffused with a mantling blush.

"Dere goes somet'ing in de water off de sho!" cried Sepharonia, who had slightly recovered from her first despair, and she pointed to the excited group at the foot of the river-bank. "'Pears to be somebody gone in a swimmin'."

"It is nothing but a big dog in the water, I fancy," was Nettie's comment, after a careless glance in the same direction.

Drusilla's eyes were now fastened steadily on the poetic figure of the swiftly-coming yacht, now less than three hundred rods away.

Her low-lying deck permitted both its occupants to be seen distinctly.

Bricks was wholly occupied with managing the boat, apparently with a practiced hand, and Fullhand was craning his neck forward over the prow, his eyes glowing with fierce and cruel expectancy.

They had both cleansed the powder-black from their faces, and their features were quite distinct.

"Two human brutes, calling themselves men, against two young women, a black girl and a baby!" muttered Drusilla, her lip curling.

Then, leveling her revolver with a deliberate aim, she fired her first shot.

The weapon, though small, was an excellent one, and its trajectory was true.

Fullhand was seen to start to one side, as a suggestion that the bullet had passed uncomfortably close.

"What are you about?" he yelled, furiously, drawing and flourishing his revolver. "Curse you! would you commit murder?"

Drusilla smiled, and for answer, sighted and fired again.

A good fore-and-aft shot narrowly missing Fullhand once more, but causing Bricks to drop the tiller and clasp his left forearm, with a bel-low of pain.

But the yacht was now at close quarters, and Fullhand, furious with rage, threw out his pistol-hand, and fired.

Doubtless a random shot, but accompanied by a shriek from the negro girl.

Nettie turned toward her with a cry of horror, while Drusilla only glanced back once.

The baby was dead in his sister's arms, shot through the head.

"Coward! infamous cur!" exclaimed Drusilla, through her clinched teeth and bloodless lips; "murderous, craven hound!"

"By Jove, that was irate!" shouted back Fullhand, seemingly in no less horror than rage. "You don't suppose—"

Here Drusilla fired again, the bullet grazing his neck, and burying itself in the mast.

But the fugitives were by this time overhauled, and Fullhand, forgetting the tragedy in his exultation, was leaning out with both hands graspingly outstretched, while Bricks, still glaring over his wounded arm, seemed capable of any reprisal.

"Give in!" roared the former. "Give in, or we'll run you down!"

But at this juncture Drusilla's last shot cut the governing cordage of the yacht's sail, letting it down with a rush, and she hurled the empty weapon desperately at the scoundrel, striking him full in the breast.

"Courage, Miss Eggleston!" shouted Barfield, now but a rod away. "I'll be at the villain in an instant!"

Even as he spoke, his bird-like pinnace struck the yacht, and he leaped to the latter's deck, but only to be straightway tackled by the muscular Curveshot Balder, who in spite of his wound, could still be a dangerous customer, and the two went down together in a furious hand-to-hand grapple.

But Drusilla had by this time been sent reeling back by a blow from Fullhand's fist, and Nettie, though struggling desperately, was already in the scoundrel's powerful grasp, and being pulled up over the yacht's gunwale.

"Stick it out!" at this instant thundered a voice, seeming from the moonlit river's depth. "Club the brute with that oar, Miss Eggleston! I am on deck!"

Drusilla uttered a scream of renewed hope, and made a snatch for the oar indicated; while Fullhand, now with Nettie crushed helplessly under his left arm, roared out an oath, and leveled revolver with his disengaged hand.

The new-comer was a swimming man, who had just grasped the small boat's gunwale.

It was the Diamond-Field Detective.

CHAPTER XL.

FATE IN THE BALANCE.

FULLHAND'S pistol spoke just as Short-Stop was flinging himself out of the water and over the small boat's side.

A lock of the detective's curling hair was nipped by the bullet from his left temple as neatly as with a pair of shears.

"Quick, Bricks!" shouted Fullhand, recoiling with Nettie still in his iron grasp. "The match! the match!"

And Bricks, who had just freed himself from his grapple with Barfield, who was momentarily dazed on his part, darted down out of sight under the yacht's deck.

"Coward! Criminal!" thundered the detective, his glance flashing from the murdered babe back upon Fullhand, whose recoil had at this instant been expedited by a ringing rap from the brandished oar in Drusilla's hand; "but fate is in this battle-balance, and your doom is fixed!"

With that, he precipitated himself like a thunderbolt along the shaky intervening space full at the scoundrel's throat.

But before the grapple could be effected, there was a smoke-puff from the yacht's hatchway, and Bricks reappeared with a scared look, only to be pounced on by Barfield again.

Then Fullhand gave a hoarse laugh of demoniac triumph, and sprang headlong into the river with Nettie in his arms.

Bricks had in the mean time tripped up Barfield, and grasped Drusilla in his muscular arms just as she was landing on the yacht's deck at the detective's side with a triumphant cry.

Then he in turn reeled back under a terrific fist-blow from Barfield, who also threw his arm around Drusilla; and just as they were all rolling off into the water in a writhing, battling group, the yacht blew up with an immense explosion.

A moment later, when the smoke and fragments of the explosion had cleared off, Short-Stop Maje, who had been thrown uninjured into the bottom of the small boat, at the terrified black girl's feet, took his primary outlook over the side, and ground his teeth with a rage too deep for more intelligent expression.

Barfield's swift and uninjured pinnace was just filling away before the wind, like a frightened bird, already twenty yards distant, with Fullhand, still holding Nettie's fainting form to his breast, in her mid-ships, and the ruffianly Bricks dragging himself up over her low stern out of the river's embrace.

But it was not this disappointing and baffling spectacle that had chiefly evoked that furious expression of the detective's anger and chagrin.

Floating near at hand on the surface of the river, was the senseless form of Drusilla Eggleston, supported by Barfield, who, while easily swimming, was gazing into her unconscious

face with an agonized anxiety that took no note of anything else in the wide world at that trying moment.

Fate had, indeed, been cast in the battle-balance, and with a result the reverse of favorable for the lion-hearted, silent-faced Diamond-Field Detective.

"Curses on the luck of it all!" he muttered, under his breath; "must that man, with his wealth, his grace, his refinement, his hundred advantages to which I am a stranger, forever interpose, and seize the best and first chance out of my clutch? Why am I not in his coveted place, with her head on my arm, even though the embracing river were my grave the following moment? Fate, fate, fate!"

Here Barfield called out for his assistance, and between them they lifted Drusilla's form in over the gunwale, the gentleman following.

She had been but temporarily stunned by the concussion of the explosion, without suffering any more serious injury, and speedily showed signs of recovery after her immersion.

"Where am I?" she at last cried, starting up. "Give me that other pistol! Whatever happens, save Nettie! Ha!"

And then she sunk back, hiding away with shuddering hands the sight of the rapidly-receding pinnace, with the returning flood of recollections that it emphasized.

"Oh, it is too much!" she murmured, brokenly. "All this trouble, and toil, and exertion, and for—nothing!"

Yes; and she might well have added, in her own case, "and all this self-sacrificing heroism, pure and simple!" but she did not, and perhaps even failed to think of it.

The two men regarded her bowed, dripping figure, so statuesque in its powerful, graceful lines, in silence.

So beautiful and yet so heroic! how could the one avoid secretly congratulating himself for having hung between the splendid creature and a watery grave, or the other stifle an angry bitterness at heart in that it was not he to grasp the golden opportunity?

"I am all dripping wet," exclaimed Drusilla, rousing herself again. "Ah, yes; the explosion—I have been in the water then?"

Falconbridge resolved to sup of his bitterness to the full.

"Of course you have," he took it upon himself to reply, with outward calmness. "And there," pointing to Mr. Barfield, "is your rescuer—your sole deliverer!"

"Oh, surely not altogether so," she murmured, but nevertheless flushing under Barfield's ardent glance. "You also, Short-Stop, were in the thick of it all."

The latter shrugged his shoulders, and straightway betook himself to the oars.

Then Drusilla's eyes fell upon the dead child, still clasped by Sepharonia, who, alone, of all participants in the night's crowning adventure, had escaped a wetting.

She shuddered, and then, placing herself gently at the girl's side, put her arm around her, and remained so without speaking again.

On the way to shore Barfield briefly explained his own presence upon the tragic scene.

Boating by moonlight had always been one of his delights, and he was taking a solitary sail in the pinnace, hired for the occasion, when, in sweeping the waters with a night-glass, his attention had been directed to the fugitive craft and its pursuer, and, half-divining something of what might be going on, had at once directed his swift course toward the theater of the struggle, with the result as described.

"It must be the truth, for he is too much of a gentleman to fabricate," growled the detective to himself, still believing apparently unconcernedly to the oars, with bowed head. "Luck, luck, luck! It was just Fate in the balance, and dead against me."

Florine was the first to seize Drusilla's hand as she stepped ashore.

"The bravest of the brave," she said simply. "You deserve the title, my dear, no less than the fiercest-mustached marshal or soldier of history."

"Speak not thus, Florine," was the murmured reply, as Drusilla tenderly assisted the still-dazed colored girl ashore, with the lifeless infant in her arms. "See; we are women, you and I, and our first duty is here."

And they forthwith gently conducted Sepharonia homeward between them.

When Short-Stop and his associates got back to the hotel, shortly before midnight, a telegram was placed in his hands.

"We must be sure to win the rubber-match here to-morrow," he coolly remarked, after glancing at the dispatch.

"Why?" asked Paul Eggleston.

"Because Miss Moore is doubtless being hurried New-York-wards," was the reply; "and here is a challenge from the Manhattanville White Stockings, which must consequently be accepted on the spot."

CHAPTER XLI.

DOWN THE HUDSON.

THE rubber game with the Peekskill boys had been played and won, only after a close and desperate struggle; and, late in the afternoon of

the same day, the victorious Owensburgers were on their way to New York by one of the Albany boats.

Short-Stop had been so rushed with business following upon the exciting adventure of the preceding night as to have hardly a thought of anything else, and was now looking among the passengers in the hope of having a quiet planning talk with Drusilla and Florine, when Chris Payne touched him on the shoulder.

The young man had lost much of his characteristic animation, and wore a heavy, discontented look that was threatening to become habitual.

"I say, Short-Stop! isn't it an infernal shame now?" he blurted out, confidentially.

"Isn't what a shame?"

"Why, the way that rich Barfield fellow—fifteen years her senior, if a day!—is tagging around after Drusilla Eggleston."

"Where is she now? I am looking for her."

"Over yonder, by the port wheel, with that Mrs. Vavassour. See? Yes; and Barfield, as usual! By Cracky! if my old Governor would only shell out as he might, who knows but I'd be as rich and polished as that Barfield, and with just as good a chance—"

"Oh, bosh, Chris! grow a thicker beard, and try to think of something else than pretty women!"

And, with a good-natured laugh to soften the brusqueness of the interruption, Falconbridge made his way toward the two ladies with an indifferent air.

Both were quick to perceive that he wished to converse with them apart, and, as they made room for him on the bench between them, Barfield, who had evidently been vainly desiring a similar invitation, made his excuses and floated away with a rather disconsolate look.

"You saw the Alexander family again before leaving, I presume?" was the detective's first query.

Florine and Drusilla were, as a matter of course, in the habiliments of their sex, and were both looking very well, considering their recent adventures.

"Yes," the former took it upon herself to reply. "They were somewhat quieter over the baby's death, but even the considerable sum we placed at their disposal, with the compliments of the team and others though gratefully received, did not check some fresh outbursts of grief."

"And their sentiment toward Fullhand!"

"It is simply murderous. The general popular indignation is as nothing, compared to the fury of the colored family. Even John Henry, who seems to have been Fullhand's unscrupulous tool for years, would doubtless strangle him on sight, if the opportunity were offered him; and as for the poor old mammy, her thirst for revenge is on a par with her grief."

"The girl, Sepharonia?"

"She continued in her stupid half-dazed condition. Poor girl!"

"Yes," interposed Drusilla. "Poor Sepharonia's ambition for a rise in the world will doubtless prove her ruin. I doubt if she will ever be her bright and healthy self again. Look at poor Sampson Augustus, too. He doubtless feels his family affliction deeply, though he takes such a ridiculous mode of showing it. Poor fellow! with this private grief, he is now most likely, in his own estimation, the very head and front of the Avenging Nine, with their chief responsibility upon his shoulders."

She had indicated the colored youth, who was standing apart from the crowd with Tommy Dodd on the opposite side of the deck.

Sampson Augustus was still conspicuous or nothing. In addition to his many-hued baseball costume, which he persisted in wearing on all occasions, on and off duty, he had framed a huge, stiff, flaring red pasteboard letter B over the aggressive visor of his sporting-cap, doubtless with sanguinary significance; his ordinarily good-humored physiognomy was set in a stereotyped frown or scowl of diabolical grimness, while his slouchy demeanor had taken on a profoundly melodramatic and tragic air that seemed to excite the secret envy of his present companion.

"The child's murder shall be avenged!" said the detective, in his low, thrilling voice; "and that in shorter order than Fullhand can probably anticipate."

Both ladies looked at him expectantly, but at this juncture Mr. Tommy Dodd, who had separated from Sampson Augustus, came up and saluted the group with his customary stagginess.

"Excuse my intrusion, boss," he remarked, with a profoundly pardon-asking bow to the ladies, "but I think you ought to have a tip with regard to that coon of ours."

"What's the matter with him?"

"He's fairly on the jumping rampage for Bel-lud, my liege! You perhaps marked that horrid and ensanguined heraldic symbol on the moke's dancing crest—the new device on his scutcheon, so to speak?"

"If you refer to the pasteboard initial pinned over Sampson's cap-front, yes."

"Boss," with theatrical impressiveness, "it stands for Bel-lud!"

"Ah, indeed!"

"Sure as you live, boss! and I'd hate to be shifting scenes, or hammering out stage-thunder, on the Old Bowery boards at the present hour, with Sampson Augustus Alexander in the Bill Sykes murder act, or in the Othello smothering scene."

"Aba! danger, eh?"

"There's blood on the face of the moon, boss, should that coon meet Montague Fullhand face to face, back to back, hand to hand, heel to heel, on his present thoughts intent."

"That will do, and thanks, Tommy! Just keep your eye on Sampson, lest he should swallow more than a barrel or two of gore before we reach the city, and then report to me, as I may have a special commission for you. Wait!"

Tommy turned again, on the point of taking his departure.

"Are you thoroughly acquainted with that building in which the Zorilla Mining Company has its elegant new offices?"

"Not so, my sovereign liege. Only the ground-floor is fully occupied, as yet."

"Well, you will give your earliest attention to the janitor of the building, together with the topmost unoccupied rooms."

"There are thirteen stories, boss; and the passenger elevator isn't in the shaft yet."

"No matter; so much the more need of information. Report to me at our Harlem hotel to-night, if possible."

Mr. Dodd unlimbered his stateliest bow, and effected a stoical retreat.

Both Florine and Drusilla looked eagerly at the detective.

"You don't surely apprehend," exclaimed the former, "that Montague Fullhand will venture to appear at the Zorilla offices at once?"

"By no means," was the reply. "But Mr. Secretary Montgomery Moore may answer for him at a pinch."

Florine looked uneasy.

"You suspect something there?" she queried.

"I do; and have suspected it. Florine, you have done nobly so far. Don't sully my increasing good opinion of you by keeping even an atom of pity in your heart for that scoundrel we are both equally interested (or should be) in hunting into his last ditch."

All this was quite incomprehensible to Drusilla, who, however, prudently held her peace.

CHAPTER XLII.

A FRESH CLEW.

FLORINE'S face presently cleared, and the mingled beauty and firmness which could be its engaging characteristic when she chose, came into her lineaments.

"I shall tread the last lingering remnant of it out of my heart!" she exclaimed, resolutely.

"Henceforth, I am for truth and honor (with your good help,) if I starve to death by the change. There's my hand on it!"

Falconbridge bowed his head, and gravely took the glove hand so earnestly extended to him.

"You will know more of this presently, Miss Eggleston," he said, turning with a smile to Drusilla. "Florine is at liberty to make you her confidante, and we shall doubtless confer together again this evening. Excuse me now. I see that manager of the Harlem White Stockings conversing with our boys, and they are doubtless wanting me."

"Let us go into the saloon!" said Drusilla, somewhat hurriedly, when he had gone. "I don't want Mr. Barfield to find me again at present."

Florine accompanied her with an amused smile.

"That man is greatly in love with you, my dear," she observed, when they were seated in the saloon.

"Nonsense! Mr. Falconbridge is too stern a man to be in love with any woman."

"He, too, eh? Well, I might have included him had I thought a moment."

"What do you mean, Florine?"

"I referred to Mr. Barfield."

"Oh!"

And Drusilla blushed in more confusion than she was in the habit of betraying.

"So! Then you only just now discover that there are two of them?"

"By no means. The idea of Old Falcon being in love, and with me!"

"He isn't old, save in his sobriquet, by the way."

"I didn't mean that. Of course he isn't. However, I had forgotten that poor boy, Chris Payne!"

And Drusilla laughed.

"That one would be young enough, in all conscience, even with addition of some salt."

"I should say so!"

"Poor Falconbridge!"

"He isn't poor. Why do you say that?"

"No matter. Barfield is doubtless the best *parti* all round."

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Oh, he is rich, handsome, clever, agreeable, affectionate—"

"And a do-nothing! However, he is probably all you say. Let us talk about something else."

"With all my heart! Men are a subject more or less stale, at best."

"In that sense, yes, perhaps! But now about Fullhand and this mysterious Zorilla Company secretary?"

"Well?"

"There is a mystery about the latter, then?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

Florine smiled, and then seemed to reflect.

"Wait till to-morrow, or till we can talk with Short-Stop again," she replied, after a pause. "There is just this to it now: I have long suspected a mystery in connection with that man, and now first perceive that our detective friend has got hold of the same idea."

"Even after your trying to throw him off the scent by advancing the notion that Secretary Moore and Bricks-Hitchcock, or Mr. Alias, as they ought to call him, might be one and the same person?"

Florine colored.

"I own to having wished to delude him as to the truth," she frankly admitted. "But that is over now."

"I feel sure it is," and Drusilla took the older woman's hand. "I want to remain your friend, my dear Florine. I feel sure you will help me to become such by being a true, honest woman!"

Florine was not a little affected, and the impulsive kiss that she gave her companion just then was a sufficient answer in itself for the time being.

Here there were indications of some sort of excitement below decks forward, together with shouts of rough laughter, and presently young Chris Payne was seen separating from Mr. Barfield, after which he approached the two ladies, looking hot and confused.

"What was the sensation out forward there, Mr. Payne?" asked Drusilla.

"Oh, the most ridiculous thing in the world! And he laughed with something of his boyish animation once more. "I do believe that coon of ours, Sampson Augustus, must be growing daft."

"What of him?"

"Why, he suspended from the fore-castle ceiling by a piece of tarred rope an enormous meat-ax, which he had found lying around somewhere, and fell to apostrophizing it, after the manner of Macbeth and the air-drawn dagger, in the most bloodthirsty and vaunting improvisations conceivable. Even when he had collected a great crowd, who did nothing but guff and jeer him, he persisted in his nonsense, till Short-Stop led him away by the ear. It was too absurd!"

"Sampson must be looked after," commented Drusilla, gravely, while Florine burst out laughing. "I fear that the poor young man's intellect may become affected. Besides, his stage heroics are not much more extravagant than little Tommy Dodd's, after all."

"But I wanted to say something else to you, Miss Eggleston." And Chris's confusion returned.

"What is it, Mr. Payne?"

"That—that gentleman, Mr. Barfield, you see—he's just made a queer proposition to me."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; it seems that he is accompanying our team down the river, without having let his daughter know of his intentions."

"Well?"

"Well, he proposes that I run up to Hudson City by rail, and escort Miss Barfield back to the city—to the Hotel Brunswick, where her father always puts up when in New York."

"A capital trip for you, I should say! and you will have time before the next match-game."

"Yes, yes?" a little testily; "but that isn't exactly the—the possible drawback."

"No? What, then?"

"Well, you see, Miss Eggleston, I told Barfield—that is—I didn't exactly refuse to go after his daughter, on—the condition that—that you wouldn't object to—to my sort of cavaliering another young lady in public!"

Drusilla elevated her eyebrows in amusement, before fully understanding the silly young fellow's drift, while Florine hastily quitted her seat to indulge her laughter unrestrainedly.

"Oh!" cried Miss Eggleston at last. "Why, what possible objection could I have, Mr. Payne. Execute Mr. Barfield's commission, by all means; and, very sweetly, "if you don't improve the chance of making a good impression with such a charming young girl as Letitia Barfield (she must be a year or two younger than yourself, by the way), it will be your own fault."

Then, as poor Chris shrunk back, looking more confused than ever, she joined Florine, Short-Stop and Mr. Barfield in the general move that was being made out of the saloon, for the New York landing was now being approached.

"What can that man mean?" asked Drusilla a moment later, on the outer deck, as a great hulking, slouch-batted book-peddler, who had

boarded the craft at Yonkers, brushed rudely by her. "That is his second rudeness or clumsiness, whichever it may be."

Before Barfield could interpose, Short-Stop Maje stepped up to the fellow, took up one of his books, under a pretense of examining it, and peered up keenly at the face under the hat-brim.

The next instant he had torn the head-covering and a pair of false whiskers away, disclosing the identity of Mr. Alias, as Drusilla had last alluded to him.

The fellow uttered an oath, dropped his packages, and sprang to the guard-rail.

The detective was upon him in an instant, with a tiger's spring.

At that instant, however, Bricks turned like lightning, drew a heavy revolver, and, aiming it point blank at the detective's breast, fired.

CHAPTER XLIII.

IN NEW YORK.

NOTWITHSTANDING the close-range, point-blank bullet, however, which, to all appearances, should have pierced the detective's heart, the latter at once closed with his assailant, with a fierce, remorseless cry.

There was an instant's struggle, then the guard-rail gave way with a splintering crash, and the two men pitched headlong into the river.

In another instant they had disappeared, locked in a grappling grip, beneath the perturbed surface, almost directly in front of the steamer's wheel, which, after a moment's pause incidental to the wharf being approached, was again furiously churning the water into eddies and foam.

Barfield looked up in silent, scarcely realizable horror, while Drusilla's face was like chalk.

"A dastardly deed!" exclaimed a bystander, while there was the usual excitement natural to such an occasion. The smaller of the two must have got the bullet in his ribs even before he went overboard so pluckily with his hand on the scoundrel's throat.

"Not much!" cried Florine, triumphantly picking up the book let fall by the detective at the last moment. "Don't faint, Drusilla. Look!"

She exhibited the book—a thick, cheaply-bound volume of several hundred pages—with the intercepted bullet buried into its thickness, which it had pierced more than half through.

Miss Eggleston caught her breath, her pallor being quickly replaced by a bright, hopeful color, which was not lost upon Barfield, who thereupon bit his lip, and seemed ill at ease.

"Hurrah!" at this juncture shouted Chris Payne, who had scrambled to the top of the wheel-house, where he was waving his hat enthusiastically; "there's Short-Stop Maje, right side up with care, though the other chap has probably gone to the bottom. Hailol but he seems unable to swim. No; there goes a diver to his support. By Jupiter! if it isn't our rainbow make, Sampson Augustus, I hope I may bu'st!"

This substantially proved the upshot of the adventure.

Bricks had disappeared; Short-Stop, after experiencing a stunned sensation, was supported in the water by the faithful negro lad until both were assisted on board the boat; it remained uncertain whether Bricks had been drowned or had mysteriously effected an escape; the landing was effected a few minutes later; and that was the end of the episode, brief, sudden and exciting as it had been.

Late in the evening of the same day Florine and Drusilla were conferring together in their private parlor of a west-side Harlem hotel, at which the touring team had decided to set up their headquarters, when Falconbridge entered.

They looked up eagerly.

"Has Tommy Dodd returned from his mission yet?" asked Florine.

"Not yet," and the detective smilingly seated himself. "But I am expecting him at any minute, and he will seek me here."

"Nothing further of that scoundrel Bricks, I suppose?"

"Nothing. But he has doubtless escaped. A fellow who can manage a yacht as well as he did last night isn't apt to drown in fresh water. We shall merely have to bide our next opportunity with him."

"But the steamer's wheel might have struck him when you were under the water together," suggested Drusilla. "You say that it just missed striking yourself by the luckiest chance."

"That is true. It was the instant before we were torn apart. By the way, it's pretty hard work to hang on to your man under the water, and under those circumstances."

"We should judge so, without having ever made the trial," observed Florine, smiling.

"Well, I somehow feel that I was not alone in making my escape. That ends the matter—for the present."

Here there was a knock at the door, and Mr. Thomas Dodd put in an appearance, as small as life and twice as active.

"You have explored the Zorilla Company

building, as directed?" demanded the detective, without ceremony.

"Mr. Falconbridge, your instructions have been fulfilled to the letter."

"With what result?"

"The janitor is an honest Scotchman, fonder of money than of even oat-meal or whisky."

"To the point, my man."

"He occupies sky-parlors in the fortieth or fiftieth story of the towering edifice, I forget which."

"Well?"

"Family consists of a wife, daughter and idiot son—the last putting one forcibly in mind of that sweet old drama, 'The Idiot Witness; or, The Pale of Blood.'"

"Any one else in family?"

"A mysterious young lady guest, received this morning at daylight; can't be seen; accompanied by the daughter of the house."

The two ladies' eyes sparkled, but the detective's voice and manner remained unchanged.

"A prisoner, do you think?"

"No way of telling."

"But your opinion?"

"Is that the Campbell family are Miss Nettie's new jailers."

"What do you base it on?"

"The still small voice that softly, sepulchral-ly whispers to me from out the misty unknown—the mind, the spirit, the intuition, the Promethean spark—"

"Enough of that, sir!"

"Otherwise, Mr. Falconbridge, on the old duffer's manner when I was doing my best to pump him dry, while pouring Scotch whisky into him by the pint measure."

"That is more like it. What was his manner?"

"Foxy and timid, by turns; a sort of tacit admission that there was a mystery of some sort."

"How can we best ascertain the truth?"

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"By the ladies calling on the janitor's wife on some trumped-up excuse. Then, while the family's attention or suspicions are engaged below, you and I might gain the roof from the adjoining buildings, and see if there ain't facilities for the skylight act."

"Good!" exclaimed Short-Stop, while the ladies seemed equally pleased with the suggestion.

"What excuse could we make for calling on the janitor's wife?" murmured Florine, half to herself.

"She and her daughter are bang-up lace-makers, for one thing," suggested Tommy Dodd.

"Excellent! And Sampson Augustus shall accompany us as our page-in-waiting."

Drusilla had eagerly risen, while the detective got up more reflectively.

"It is a delicate business," he observed.

"But Heaven grant that we are once more on the track of the much-wronged young lady's place of captivity!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

UP IN THE AIR.

THE new building, part of whose ground floor was occupied by the offices of the Zorilla Silver Mining Company, was situated near the Battery, or, lower end of Broadway, and was, together with an older adjoining edifice, one of the very loftiest in the city.

Story after story rose in bewildering window-tiers, climbing one above another, as if forming all constructive limitations between their earth-foundations and the fixed stars.

A towering, imposing monstrosity, a stupendous joke of a facade, a roof commanding a view like a mountain-top.

When Florine and Drusilla, attended by Sampson Augustus, presented themselves before this wonder of brick, mortar and terra cotta at about eight o'clock of the evening under consideration, they at first hesitated with a naturally uneasy sensation, such as is sometimes experienced on the brink of some momentous and overpowering investigation.

The frowning magnitude of the many-windowed, cloud-aspiring walls, together with the loneliness of the hour and the comparatively deserted aspect of the street, seemed to daunt and oppress them.

"Where did Short-Stop and Tommy Dodd go?" whispered Drusilla. "I wish they had waited with us a minute or two longer."

"They disappeared into yonder entrance," Florine replied, pointing to the adjoining pile.

"Falconbridge discovered that he was well acquainted with the ex-policeman janitor in charge, which will doubtless facilitate their reaching its roof, and perhaps co-operating with us, with but little difficulty on their part."

"How I wish our janitor was an ex-policeman with whom we were well acquainted! The solitude of all that windowed emptiness up yonder appalls me somewhat. Murders might be committed away up among some of those empty top floors, without an outcry being heard down here."

"Pshaw! Are we tyros in adventure, that we should hesitate at the threshold of this hulking

mass of architectural ugliness? Sampson, find the janitor's bell, and ring it."

Sampson Augustus, who had been provided with a new costume, somewhat less startlingly variegated than its predecessor, at the grateful detective's expense, advanced boldly into the moonlighted entrance, and presently came back shaking his head.

"Dere's a obfustercation," he said. "What sort ob bells do janitors use, ma'm? Eff it's a or'nary dinner-bell, I doan't see nq handle."

The night was hot, and there were some promenaders on the street, mostly from the airy households of janitors and private watchmen.

A couple of these promenaders, young girls, bare-headed, now strolled up and inquired what was wanted.

"Oh, I'll find the bell for you!" cried one, when their curiosity had been satisfied; and she straightway ran into the mazy entrance and pulled a knob, or did something of the kind.

"Are you after seeing Mrs. Campbell about the lace-work?" inquired her companion, duly impressed by the elegant toilettes of the visitors, to say nothing of the 'nigger in waiting,' as she would have doubtless characterized poor Sampson, with his stilted stride and self-important airs.

"Yes."

"You ought to be welcome, then. For, though it's beautiful and expensive Irish lace that Mrs. Campbell and Jenny make, there are fewer ladies call for it of late than formerly. They ought to set up a little store somewhere up-town. But then perhaps the strange young woman who came to them just after daylight this morning—maybe she makes lace, too, or is to help them sell what they produce."

Here the other girl returned to say she thought Mr. Campbell would make his appearance before long.

"But he's always slow in answering a ring at night, and no wonder," she went on to say. "You see, there is only a temporary elevator car at work in the shaft at present, and it doesn't work very well; while the stairways are too many to be of use from the top of the building. Going up there is like visiting St. Peter."

Both Florine and Drusilla thanked the young girls for their good-nature, while equally impressed by the allusion to the visiting 'strange young woman.'

Florine cautiously returned to that topic now, and dextrously angled for what further information might be at hand.

It wasn't much, but yet enough to strengthen the hope that the visiting stranger and Nettie Moore might be one and the same.

One of the girls, the one who had first broached the hint, had caught a glimpse of the new arrival, while leaning out of one of her mother's windows, at the top of a business building opposite, for a few breaths of the early-morning freshness.

"What was she like?" demanded Florine, sinking all attempts at diplomacy in her impatience.

"I couldn't tell, I was so high up," was the reply. "But she seemed to be a young thing, poorly dressed, and in bad health, from the way the men helped her into the entrance from the carriage."

"How many men?"

"There were two."

"Please tell me everything you observed. I will cheerfully pay you, and pay you well, for your good-nature."

Florine's request was complied with, but the girl suddenly ceased speaking, and gave her a warning look.

Florine hurriedly slipped a dollar into her informant's hand, and then turned to confront Campbell, the janitor, who had just stepped out of the great entrance, while the two girls hastily withdrew to some distance, as though they feared or disliked the man.

"I dunno," replied Mr. Janitor Campbell, scratching his head reflectively, after listening to Florine's glib explanation of the visit, and leering inquisitively at both ladies and their escort. "Yas, my missus bez the laces to sell, but, you see, leddies, he's tuk unco' bad to-night."

"Who is it that is taken so bad, if you please, Mr. Campbell?" inquired Florine, with sympathetic sweetness.

"My son, ma'm. He's rampin' in the upper-works betimes, not to say ijotical, and—and—well, he's roaring to-night, and no mistake."

"How sad! However, it is your wife and daughter only that we wish to see, you know."

"But that's just it. My missus is about got her hands full wi' Sawnie, while as for Jenny, she's busy enough wi' lookin' arter the—No matter," correcting himself in no little confusion, "she's got her business cares, too, of late."

"What are we to do, Mr. Campbell? Oh, dear! we must have some of your wife's laces, after coming all the way from Albany for them."

"What! ye ha' come all the way from Albany?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Florine, who could prevaricate with charming earnestness on occasion.

"However, if a sale of, say fifty dollars' worth

of laces is of no object to your wife and daughter, we must look elsewhere."

"Fifty dollars' worth!"

"Yes; or perhaps more."

"Ye might call to-morrow."

"Thanks! and then again we mightn't. Come, Mrs. Vanderbilt, we seem to have had our trouble for nothing. Sampson, find our coachman."

Instantly Mr. Janitor Campbell was all obsequiousness and anxiety.

"If you wouldn't mind Sawnie's roaring," he hastened to say, "I might look after him myself while my missus war wi' ye."

"We mind no one's roaring, Mr. Campbell, when we gratify our caprice—no, nor a lion's roaring either, for that matter. We're accustomed to paying our way and taking our choice. Lead the way then. Come, Vandy; Sampson, attend us."

As they followed the now eager Scotchman into the building, one of the young girls made a warning gesture, as much as to say, "Look out for that Campbell; he isn't the best in the world!" but Florine only nodded gayly in reply.

"Bless me! are we to make the ascension in that cage?" she exclaimed, a moment later, stepping back.

They had been ushered into the ground-floor hallway, the great door being closed and locked behind them, and were now before the temporary elevator.

It was an uncouth but substantial-looking wired-in platform, that had probably been used by the workmen in finishing off the interior.

It seemed to hang as if suspended by vapory threads amid the black, ghostly hollowness of the shaft, dimly made visible by a single gas-jet from the adjoining vastness of the hallway.

"It ben't muckle to brag on," remarked the janitor apologetically, "but you'd find the stairways like Jacob's Ladder for the number o' steps."

They stepped in upon the staging without further protest, and, in obedience to a touch on a dangling rope, began straightway to rise into the immensity and blackness of the upper regions.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE JANITOR'S MYSTERIES.

A PART, at least, of the young girl's warning signal at parting was speedily comprehended by the passengers on the elevator staging before they had ascended to any considerable distance into the upper mysteries of the great office building.

This was an uncomfortable realization of Mr. Campbell's whisky-laden breath, which, in the confined atmosphere of the shafting, soon became intolerably disgusting and thick enough to cut in slices with a cheese-knife.

Even Sampson Augustus, who might have been thought smoke dried and case-hardened in the alcoholic line from paternal associations, uttered a gasping "Whoof!" or two on the way up, and Florine subsequently declared it fortunate that no light accompanied the ascent, else there might have been a case of spontaneous combustion, with disastrous consequences.

However, all afflictions, like the measles and snake-bite, have their periods, and at last the car came to a bumping stop at the topmost landing, where a feeble light was burning, and where the ladies, followed by their attendant, hopped out of the wire cage with sighs of relief little short of ecstatic.

"Laws o' Massy!" gasped Sampson Augustus, mopping his face with a red and yellow bandanna that would have joyed the soul of a Cleveland and Thurman boom, "radder sultry an' orbnxious in dat elewater. 'Pears ter me dat we mus' have passed froo a busted kerosine mill."

"Yes," admitted Mr. Campbell, with odoriferous unconsciousness. "Them Eytalian laborers do leave an unco smell behind 'em. This way, leddies, if you please!"

As he led her the way toward some living rooms near at hand, the door of one of them, pleasantly lighted, opened, and a sad-faced gentle-appearing woman of middle age made her appearance.

Simultaneously there rose from somewhere not far away a strangely-terrifying sort of cry, human in its character, and yet so wild-beast-like in its savage, heart-quaking intensity as to cause the visitors' cheeks to pale instinctively.

"It's only Sawnie," said the janitor, reassuringly; and, turning abruptly to the woman, he asked, harshly: "How is he doing?"

"Quietly enough, and I left him secured," was the low-voiced, but strangely-indifferent reply.

She was then introduced by the janitor as his "missus," and the alleged business of the visitors was as briefly stated.

"She'll attend to you, leddies," said Campbell, as they passed into the lighted room together. "As for me—de'il take that roarin'! there he goes again—I ha' business elsewhere."

He disappeared into what seemed like a general corridor connecting the various living-rooms; there was a suspicious sound of a bottle being unworked and then applied to without the intervention of a glass; then they heard the

shuffle of his retreating steps, followed by more distant sounds, as of curses and blows; after which, with a last reverberation of that inhuman, terrifying cry, there was a silence.

"How very dreadful!" Drusilla could not help exclaiming.

"I am used to it by this time," said the janitor's wife; making haste to add: "The poor creature is Campbell's son, but not mine.—You would like to examine some of our work, I suppose?"

She thereupon produced some really beautiful specimens of hand-made lace, which at once evoked the unqualified commendations of her visitors.

Florine who had a very queenly way of her own where money was concerned, soon set aside several of the pieces, paying the cash for them, and then expressed a desire to examine more specimens.

"I haven't any more of my own work at present," the woman reluctantly admitted.

"But we understand that your daughter is equally skillful with yourself. Let us see some of her work."

"Several of these patterns are Jenny's work," and Mrs. Campbell pointed them out.

"But we don't fancy those. Can't your daughter bring us some more?"

"Not now," hesitatingly. "She—she is nursing a friend, who is ill in one of our other rooms."

"Bless me! must your daughter also take care of 'Sawnie'?"

"It isn't Sawnie that is ill."

"Ah; doubtless your young lady-visitor of so early this morning?"

The woman caught her breath, a kind of terror coming into her face.

"Hush!" she faltered; "my husband might be listening."

"Dear me! and what of that?"

"Oh, do not speak so loud, please! How did you know of my young lady?—Not that there is one here, mind!"

Florine elevated her eyebrows, and repeated what the young girl on the sidewalk had said.

"She's one of those Ryans across the way!" exclaimed the janitor's wife, impatiently.

"They are always spying into other folks' affairs!"

"But what mystery can there be in your receiving a young lady visitor at an early morning hour?"

"None—none whatever! of course, not!"

"Does your daughter work at her lace-making while looking after the young lady who is ill?"

"Sometimes—perhaps," with increasing uneasiness. "That is—"

"Oh, never mind!" cried Florine, independently. "If she can't come to us, I suppose there can be no objection to our going to her. Is this the way?" And she stepped into the corridor.

"Oh, you mustn't! indeed, indeed, you mustn't, madam!" and with a sort of terrified spring, the woman had clutched her by the arm. "I wouldn't venture on it, not for my life!"

Drusilla and Sampson Augustus, taking their cue from Florine's bold action, had also risen and approached the corridor entrance.

It was a long one, communicating with room-doors on the left, besides having one at its further extremity, and with windows on the right, through which the moon was brightly shining, to the additional revelation of a trap-door in the ceiling, with connecting steps, between two of the windows near the opposite end.

Florine, who had taken in her new bearings at a glance, decided on yet bolder action, without any more preliminaries.

Releasing her arm from the woman's grasp by a sudden athletic twist, she in her turn seized the other's wrist.

"Listen, my good woman!" Her words were low-voiced, but stern and determined. "We are here to communicate with the young lady who is ill, or whom your brute of a husband is keeping confined here against her will. Make a single outcry now, and it will be at your peril! On the other hand, facilitate our secret object, and it shall be more in your pocket than lace-making could fetch you in a year!"

The janitor's wife was in an agony of hesitation, and yet her eyes had sparkled greedily.

"I cannot—I dare not!" she faltered. "He would kill me. Hark!"

That savage, demoniac howl again, with a repetition of the muffled curses and blows, all seemingly proceeding from one of the rooms midway along the corridor.

"So much the better!" continued Florine, decidedly. "Your husband's attention is doubtless fully engrossed as it is, which makes this our opportunity. Come!" and, partly dragging the woman with one hand, she displayed a tempting roll of money in the other.

"Hush, hush, then!" murmured the janitor's wife. "And for Heaven's sake tread softly!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

ON THE THRESHOLD.

As the party hurried cautiously along the corridor, there came a sound of tramping feet on the roof, indicating perhaps that Short-Stop

and Tommy Dodd were having some sort of trouble in their proposed co-operation from that quarter; while the curses and blows in what was presumably the idiot's prison-room, suddenly subsided, with the growled-out words in the janitor's voice:

"There, the de'il seize you! Perhaps you'll be quieter now."

Mrs. Campbell was very white, and she trembled like a leaf, but the grasp on her wrist was relaxed, and Florine's manner was threatening and encouraging by turns.

Then the latter queried, "Which is the door?" by signs.

The woman indicated the one at the extremity of the passage.

Then they were on the threshold.

Florine dropped the woman's wrist, with a last sign of warning, and opened the door.

A rather comfortable interior was revealed, with a comely young woman, knitting lace at a bedside, who started up in surprise at the sudden intrusion.

Then the occupant of the couch itself, who was none other than Nettie Moore, and who was not undressed, likewise rose into a sitting posture.

In spite of a pantomimic warning to caution on the part of both visitors, the joyful view of Drusilla's face once more was too much for her.

"Oh, my friend, my friend!" she cried, stretching out her arms. "I see you again—Heaven has not wholly deserted me—I am saved!"

The evil was done, and the entire party, pushing their way into the room, had only time to turn around before old Campbell, furious with rage and drink, sprang into the corridor, slamming the door of his idiot son's room behind him.

"What does it mean?" he roared, advancing threateningly toward the open room in which the women and Sampson Augustus were grouped. "Beldam!" to his wife; "it's yousel! I'll hold to the responsibility o' this night's work!" And, fairly purpling with fury, he spat on his hands yet more suggestively.

"The ladies insisted—I couldn't help myself," pleaded the wife, shivering with fear. "They wanted to see Jenny's lace-work. Indeed, John—"

"Lies, lies, lies! Spies, devils, and conspiracies!" thundered the janitor, grinding his teeth, and flourishing a formidable-looking "jimmy" which he suddenly produced from one of his pockets. "Woman, you have betrayed my secret! I was to have five hundred dollars from President Fullband for keeping that girl out of sight for a fortnight. But now!"

He gnashed his teeth afresh, and was apparently about to rush upon the woman, when the latter recoiled, with another horror than that which he inspired.

"Look!" she screamed, pointing back over his shoulder with a slaking hand. "For the love of Heaven! it is Sawnie!"

At the same time there was a demoniac chuckle behind him.

The janitor, sobered in an instant, wheeled like a flash, but he was too late.

There was only time to hear the chuckle swell into one of those blood-curdling, maniacal howls; then there was just a glimpse of the escaping madman—a huge, hulking creature, with a skull no bigger than a monkey's, and a face like a gibbering fiend's—slipping up the steps and out upon the freedom of the roofs!

The horror-stricken janitor was instantly in pursuit, but was again too late.

The door of the trap had been closed and secured on the outside.

Then, while he was still hammering vainly on the under side, there was the trampling commotion of a terrible struggle of some sort overhead.

This was followed by a shout, then a repetition of the madman's scream, and an appalling crash.

Then all the women shrieked and started back, pointing to the moonlight-flooded window on a line with the trap-door steps.

Following a falling shower of bricks and mortar, a body had gone plunging down into the area below—a body which, swift as was its shooting passage, all had instantly recognized as that of the half-dressed idiot.

"St. Andrew preserve us!" ejaculated the now horrified Scotchman, staggering backward down the steps. "My ain Sawnie."

But this was not all.

After the briefest cessation, the struggling sounds on the roof had recommenced, and, it seemed, with added violence.

Then there was a scream in a youthful voice, a fresh shower of debris, and two bodies, grappling together, went plunging down and past.

Drusilla uttered a piercing shriek, for she, at least, in that fleeting instant, had recognized one of the descending pair.

"It was Falconbridge—Old Falcon himself!" she gasped, seizing Florine for support. "Oh, God! now let me die, too."

"Hush! impossible! It could not have been!" cried her friend.

But, at this juncture, the trap was torn open, and a small, spry but trembling figure, revolver in hand, made its appearance on the steps.

It was Tommy Dodd, with a face like parchment, and his hair on end.

"Who were those men who fell from the roof together?" demanded Florine, sharply.

"Short-Stop and Bricks!" was the almost choked response.

Drusilla shrieked again, and swooned in Florine's arms.

In spite of his own horror, Tommy Dodd had taken in the meaning of the situation at a glance. Then he seemed to nerve himself into intelligent action.

"Down-stairs with you, and see the upshot of it!" he shouted, menacing the Scotchman with his huge weapon. "Sampson, you go, too! Be off with you! My place is here till I know the best or worst."

And, as the janitor and colored youth disappeared, he planted himself on a chair at the door of Nettie's prison-room, with the revolver across his knees.

CHAPTER XLVII. INSIDE THE BARRIER.

To return, as is necessary, to Short-Stop and Tommy Dodd at the outset of their part in that eventful night's terrible adventure, they succeeded in speedily making their way to the roof of the tall adjoining building, after leaving Drusilla and Florine, with Sampson Augustus, at the entrance of the yet loftier and newer edifice containing the Zorilla Mining Company offices.

This they were enabled to do through the good nature of an ex-policeman and whilom intimate acquaintance of Short-Stop's, who resided in janitor's apartments on the top floor, as did the Scotchman, Campbell, in the more pretentious building.

But this roof was twenty odd feet lower than its mightier rival, and how to reach the summit of the latter became at once the leading question of the moment.

"I can lend you a ladder that will reach two-thirds of the distance up," said the ex-policeman, after a little reflection. "But, that won't help the matter any."

"Yes, it may," replied the detective. "Fetch it along."

The man hesitated a moment, and then said:

"I'll do that much for you, Falconbridge, but you must not ask me to assist you further. I have already stretched my small authority to oblige you."

"I understand, old fellow. Bring me the ladder, and I shall ask no more, besides thanking you kindly, into the bargain."

The man accordingly produced the ladder from one of the lumber rooms below, and then disappeared down into the building, with a shrug of the shoulders, and a movement of the hands suggestive of washing them of whatever might result.

Short-Stop laughed, and, picking up the ladder, examined it carefully in the bright moonlight.

It proved to be strong and, fortunately, light.

"Half a loaf is better than no bread!" asserted the detective, philosophically. "Tommy, bear a hand!"

Together they planted it against the adjoining wall, only to find that it could not be made to reach within less than six feet of the upper edge.

"It will never do!" cried Tommy.

"Yes, it will; though it would do better if I were six feet two, instead of five feet eight."

"Or, if the ladder, say, were about six feet longer, boss."

"Either way. Be ready to do as I instruct you."

"Dead game is the word, boss!"

Then, while Tommy Dodd held hard against the foot of the ladder to steady it, Old Falcon carefully mounted, step by step and rung by rung.

At the topmost round he could just, by flattening himself against the wall and reaching up to his utmost, bring his finger tips to within two or three inches of the top.

But Falcon had been a Metropolitan fire-laddie in his time: and to have been a proficient in that field of public usefulness is about equivalent to being capable of almost anything calling for coolness, courage and athletic address.

"Hold hard!" he called down below, while remaining apparently glued against the blank wall.

"Hard it is!" was the response.

Then, executing a gliding, straight-up leap, like a frog's along the inner glass wall of an aquarium tank, the daring detective, with astonishing cleverness, caught his hooked fingertips over the masonry edge.

Tommy looked up from below, and fairly caught his breath.

But the next instant, by a herculean effort, the detective had drawn his body up over the wall!

Then he was seen, after a brief breathing space, leaning over, head down, and hands down-stretched.

"Now's your time, my little man!" he called out. "Up with the ladder as far as you can boost it!"

Tommy Dodd was stronger than might have been expected of one of his diminutive size.

He managed to hoist the ladder so that Short-Stop obtained a grip of its sides.

"On with you now!" called out the latter again; "and see that you hang on, too!"

Tommy obeyed, grasping the lower round with a firm clutch.

Then, slowly drawing his body, thus loaded, back on the ledge, Short-Stop swiftly dragged up the ladder, hand over hand, and the next minute his little assistant was safely landed at his side.

The vast roof whose summit they had gained at last, though so laboriously and after the loss of considerable time, was as flat as a paved court, and, like some courts that are seen, was stoutly and brightly tiled, with a low and rather insecure-looking parapet running around the sides.

"Well, by jingo, Mr. Falconbridge!" exclaimed Mr. Dodd, in his heaviest tragedy tone, and seizing his muscular principal by the hand; "there's no use in praising anything you do, since your worst is always more than a match for any other man's best. But that ladder trick was just immense! Holy mackerel! it was more thrilling than *Arrah na Pogue's* lover's ivy-and-ruin climb in the Old Bowery, to say nothing of the hazard."

"Peace!" enjoined the detective, sternly. "We are on top of the building; the next job is to get down into it. Come!"

And he started directly for a little cupola, doubtless covering a trap entrance, well along toward the edge of the roof overlooking Battery Park and the glorious moonlighted water-view beyond Castle Garden.

Before they entered or examined the trap-house, as it might be called, Tommy Dodd stepped to the parapet and looked over and downward.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "What a pile of cotton there is down below there! Some of the bales on top are busted open, too."

"Yes," assented Short-Stop, glancing down.

"It is the remains of what was saved from the great cotton warehouse fire over on Pearl street last week. There is a vast heap of it."

"I say, boss!"

"Well!"

"If a fellow should drop just here from this height, what a bounce he'd get on that loose top-cotton before breaking every bone in his skin, wouldn't he?"

Before Short-Stop could answer the ridiculous supposition, there was a hoarse exclamation from behind, and they both wheeled in their tracks like lightning.

A man had just stepped out from the trap-house, and now confronted them in the moonlight.

That man was Bricks-Hitchcock, alias Curve-shot Balder, et al!

A long knife was in his hand, his brutal face had the savage expression of a starved wolf, and his brawny, powerful form was partly crouched, as if for a spring.

"Don't try to draw on me, Falconbridge!" he snarled out. "Before you can touch trigger I shall be upon you!"

"How came you here?" demanded the detective, who felt the truth of the other's words, and was, moreover, still uncomfortably close to the parapet. "I thought it possible you had been drowned."

"Ha, ha, ha! Of course you did. But I can swim a long distance under water, Major Jack. And I am here, as a last refuge, by a secret arrangement with Janitor Campbell, who has Fullhand's sweetheart in safe-keeping just under our feet. Ha, ha, ha! Your eyes sparkle. That is what you are here for, too, eh? To effect the gal's release?"

"It is," was the calm reply.

"But you'll never do it, save over my dead body; and two can play at that game, as you've found out. Hark ye, Falcon: did you hear some queer sort of outlandish howls somewhere below us here within a short time?"

"Yes."

In fact both the detective and Tommy had heard the maniac's cries, but very indistinctly, and, as a consequence, had made no allusion to them in their talk.

"Can you guess what they were?"

"No."

"The cries of a madman—of old Campbell's idiot son—a creature with the brain of a mouse and the strength of a lion."

"Oho!"

"Yes, my boy; and, hark you! Nettie Moore shall be thrown at that demon's, that Caliban's mercy, before you shall effect her rescue!"

Here both Short-Stop and Tommy Dodd gave a shout of both horror and warning; the maniac was there!

CHAPTER XLVIII. THE MYSTERY'S HEART.

BUT, the shout was too late!

The escaped madman's steal by step was already on the trap-house's threshold, and Bricks only turned to find himself in that wild-beast grip!

Idiot and fiend combined, the maniac not

only wrapped the hunted ruffian in his enormous grasp, but strove to reach his throat with wolf-like energy and ferocity; the fang-like teeth gnashing and glistening, the beady eyes snapping, and the short coarse black hair fairly bristling all over the knob-like, gorilla-suggesting brain-pain.

But, Bricks-Hitchcock, as has been seen, was no coward, and he was, moreover, formidably armed.

As the strangely matched pair went shuffling, grappling and hustling over the tiles, in the direction of the parapet, whence the two horrified spectators slipped quickly away to a less precarious vantage-ground, Bricks, though all but crushed in the bearish hug, was neither idle nor hopelessly helpless.

Again and again the long knife was buried into the madman's body, but at first seemingly without any effect whatever.

At last, however, it seemed to reach a vital spot, and, as Bricks tore himself out of that terrible embrace, the maniac fell with tremendous force against the parapet.

Instantly the barrier gave way, and the unfortunate monstrosity, with a parting screech, was precipitated headlong, together with a mass of debris, far out in the air and down into the abyss!

Tommy Dodd, who had retreated along the parapet-line, while Short-Stop had gone further back, shudderingly followed the body with his eyes till it struck the street, a crushed, mutilated mass, far out beyond the miniature cotton-mountain, which might otherwise have broken its plunging descent.

A double shout recalled him to a realization of his immediate surroundings.

He turned to perceive Short-Stop and Bricks engaged in another deadly grapple, scarcely less appalling than the first, and in equally dangerous proximity to the now broken parapet.

Bricks, as if with some of his first antagonist's maniacal fury imparted to himself, had evidently inaugurated the fresh struggle, but had lost his knife, which rendered the combat more even.

Tommy Dodd drew his revolver, and was dancing between the combatants and the trap-house, with the purpose of getting in a shot in favor of his beloved chief, when accident brought the struggle to an appalling termination.

Both men slipped simultaneously on fragments of the broken wall, and, the next instant, they plunged into the outer abyss, still grappled, Short-Stop Maje uppermost!

The boy uttered a yell of horror, and tottered to the giddy edge.

He could only see the falling men, Bricks undermost, strike the cotton, and then go bounding off and down.

Then he staggered back, with his hand to his eyes.

It was in this appalled condition that he made his way through the trap and upon the scene in the janitor's living-rooms in the manner that has been described.

Tommy had sat at the door of Nettie's room, with his revolver across his knees, for some time after the disappearance of Campbell and Sampson Augustus on their errand, amid a hushed and horrified silence.

There was naturally but little disposition to question him, as to the details of the tragedies, on the part of the frightened and stricken inmates of the room.

Florine was engaged, with some faltering assistance from Nettie, in restoring Drusilla to consciousness, while the Campbell women, mother and daughter, were standing in statueque horror, merely questioning each other's pale faces with terrified looks.

Suddenly the two latter started, however, and then bent their heads in listening attitudes.

"The creak of the elevator again!" cried the janitor's wife. "They are coming back!"

"What does it all mean?" demanded Drusilla, abruptly starting out of the last of her fainting fits. "Oh, I remember!" with a shudder, and yet getting resolutely upon her feet. "Ah, but God's will must be done, and Old Falcon, the bravest of the brave, the truest of the true, is dead!"

Here there was a rush of feet from without, accompanied by a loud huzza in Sampson's voice.

Then he made his appearance, tossing up his head-wear, and shouting like a tickled madman.

"Hooray!" he yelled. "No roof-tumble am gwine to wipe out Marse Short Stop, lemme tell yer! Oh, it mus' be dat de kingdom's coming, an' de year ob jubilo am here!"

Then Tommy was also on his feet with a glad cry, while the women pressed forward into the corridor.

There was Short-Stop behind Sampson—walking with something of a limp, to be sure, but serene and calm and resolute as was his wont.

"It was sheer good luck on my part," he began to explain, as soon as the vociferating dandy would give him the chance. "We lit on the cotton-heap, I on top. I have a few bruises, while Bricks is already on his way to the hospital with a broken back. The unfortunate madman is dead."

Then he glanced among the group with a smile for Florine and a glad nod toward Nettie, till his eyes rested on Miss Eggleston.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Been fainting?"

"Oh, no; or that is"—confusedly—"You see, we made sure that you were dead, and—then the heat of this place is somewhat oppressive."

"Oh, is that all?" And he just betrayed a slight disappointment, but nothing more.

Then he began to show his common-sense energy, after his usual fashion.

"Come!" he exclaimed, bustling, "this is no longer any place for us. Madam," to Mrs. Campbell, "I was glad to learn that the unfortunate idiot was not your son. But your husband and the police will doubtless be here in a few minutes with the body. Miss Moore, as soon as Mrs. Vavassour and Miss Eggleston can place you in readiness, we had better go up-town together. In all probability, your mother will be in New York to-morrow morning."

"My mother!" exclaimed Nettie, while Drusilla also looked up in surprise.

"Yes; I telegraphed for her privately on our arrival in Harlem, stating certain facts and expectations that can hardly fail to start her on the journey at the earliest opportunity. Come now; let us not linger."

Here came the heavy tramping of feet, and the women shut themselves in the room; while, as Short-Stop, Tommy Dodd and Sampson returned along the corridor to the sitting room, a sad group entered it, carrying the body of the madman.

Half an hour thereafter Short-Stop and his party, including Nettie Moor, were at their Harlem hotel.

Mrs. Moore arrived at nine o'clock the following morning, after traveling all night.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A LAST REVELATION.

MR. MONTGOMERY MOORE, secretary of the Zorilla Sierra Madres Silver Mining Company (Limited), seemed greatly surprised when one of the company's clerks entered his luxurious private office, at about eleven o'clock of the morning following the tragic events narrated in the last chapter, to inform him that an unusually numerous group of visitors were desiring to see him.

"They doubtless wish to see Mr. Fullhand, the president," said Mr. Moore, twirling his eye-glasses. "Better show them into his room."

"Mr. Fullhand is still absent from his post, sir," replied the clerk, respectfully.

He might have added, but for fear of losing his place, "As a matter of course, Mr. Fullhand is absent since you, Mr. Secretary, are present; for when have the pair of you ever been on duty at the same time, or ever been seen in one another's company?" and thus have echoed the mystified common sentiment of all the clerical force in the great mining company's employ.

This odd fact was, indeed, become the haunting mystery of the corporation, shared of late by stockholders and directors alike.

Never in the comparatively brief period that the Fullhand-Moore combination had assumed managing control of the company's lucrative mining and stock business, had they been seen at one and the same time. When President Fullhand had presided at a directors' meeting, the secretary's place, through alleged sickness or some other cause, had been temporarily filled by his chief assistant, with suitable apologies. When the secretary was present, it was President Fullhand who was absent, his chair being usually filled by one or another of the directors. And so it had gone on, to the increasing mystification of the company and of others, which would have doubtless come to some sort of culmination, sooner or later, even without the revelation that was preparing at the hands of Old Falcon and his associates.

"Who are the visitors?" demanded the secretary again.

"Mrs. Hannah Moore, of Owensburg, Miss Moore, her daughter, Mr. Falconbridge and others," replied the clerk.

"Admit them into the Directors' Room, and say that I will see them presently."

The clerk retired.

Mr. Montgomery Moore was a large, powerfully-framed man, but apparently bent with age before his time. A shock of iron-gray hair, together with long, thick disheveled beard of the same color, so effectually concealed his features that scarcely more than his eyes and nose were visible. The former were alert, cunning, restless, intelligent and piercing; while the nose was finely formed, hooked like a bird's beak, and expressive of intellectual force.

He remained at his desk silently for some moments, mechanically twirling his eye-glasses, his brows knitted in a meditative frown.

"Pshaw! I am secure, and should be fully prepared for this ordeal," he muttered to himself. "With Hitchcock speechless, at death's door with a broken back, in the hospital, what is there to fear, even if the girl has finally escaped her abductor's clutch? Besides, am I not, saving this tinge of gray in hair and beard, the

same Montgomery Moore as of old, and must not my half-brother's widow recognize me as such? The devil! there can be no danger. And, at all events, it must be now or never."

He arose resolutely, and passed into the directors' room, where the visitors were awaiting him, two or three of the office clerks being also present at several small desks in a corner of the large, expensively furnished room.

Mrs. Moore had instantly arisen at the secretary's entrance.

"Do you remember me, Montgomery?" she asked.

"Perfectly, Hannah," was the good-humored reply. "It would be odd if I didn't remember my half-brother's handsome widow. And this," with a glance at Nettie, "is the young lady whom I used to call my little niece, years ago. Keep your seat, Hannah. You also recognize me, then, it would seem?"

"Yes, indeed," continued the widow. "You are older and grayer, but not otherwise changed."

"The object of this visit, if you please?" impatiently, and with a questioning look at Florine and the detective.

"It is made at the instance of Mr. Falconbridge. He says that my husband's fortune, which was invested in this corporation in its early precarious days, was converted to your own use, Montgomery Moore, and is now of almost double the original value. My daughter and I are desirous of receiving our inheritance."

"The money was sunk in the first stock issued, before the present company was formed upon the ruins of the first one, said the secretary, shortly. "There wasn't a dollar of it saved."

"That is false!" interposed the detective, quietly. "False as you are false!"

The secretary glared, and was evidently startled.

"You would apparently make felonious charges?" he sneered.

"I would, and do!"

"Well, formulate them!" decisively. "What are they?"

"First, the one already stated by this lady—the fraudulent conversion of her husband's property. Secondly, the burglarious appropriation of three thousand dollars belonging to Miss Drusilla Eggleston, now present. The details of the charges can be had later on."

"Indeed? And whom do you charge with these alleged crimes?"

"Mr. Montague Fullhand, the president of this company, as the principal malefactor—for the present," replied Old Falcon after a pause.

"Ah! but Mr. Fullhand is not here to defend himself."

"He is present—here, in this room!" And nearly every one, with the exception of Florine, looked up in astonishment at this extraordinary announcement.

Mr. Moore was now perceptibly uneasy.

"You are either drunk or mad!" he exclaimed, turning to go. "If you have charges against our president, better wait till he confronts you. As for me—"

"Hold!" commanded the detective. "He confronts us now—he is here!"

And, with a bound that cleared the intervening space, he had precipitated himself on the secretary, and torn off his masking hair and beard.

Montague Fullhand stood revealed!

The Secretary and President of the Zorilla Company were one and the same man.

In another instant the unmasked scoundrel had closed with the detective, and a terrible struggle was in progress.

But, it was of brief duration.

The first frenzy of his maddening fury being exhausted, Fullhand-Moore, or whatever he might most appropriately be called, was but as a child in the great detective's iron grasp.

A moment later he was helpless, in the charge of police officers, who had been in waiting, and there were none looking down upon the baffled scoundrel, so defeated and so exposed, with the secret of his strange and cleverly-acted double-life henceforth bared to the world, with greater minglings of consternation and amazement than his late employees and associates of the company, who had come flocking in from the communicating offices in a startled herd.

"This for your further comfort!" exclaimed the detective, folding his arms and grimly regarding the ruined adventurer. "Bricks-Hitchcock, just before dying in the hospital, two hours ago, made an attested confession of his connection with your crimes. It vouches for all that has been charged against you, in the minutest detail. Your other crimes, including the cruel abduction of Miss Nettie Moore, and your random murder of the colored infant, can be readily proven by still living witnesses. You are now in the hands of the authorities."

The man had listened like one stunned. Now a great and weakening change took place in him.

"True, true, all true!" he gasped out, a thin froth showing on his lips. "But, restitution can and shall be made! My half-brother's fortune is still intact in the Zorilla stocks, in the

two names Fullhand and Moore! All—all that I leave should go to Hannah and her daughter, saving the three thousand dollars, with interest, which I stole from Miss Eggleston, and should be restored to her. Money won't help me now. My game is up! I—I—"

The froth had increased on his lips, and he went down in convulsions.

In three minutes he was a dead man, having, as subsequently proved, succeeded in swallowing a deadly drug, probably at the moment of his unmasking at the detective's hands.

"Strange! almost incomprehensible! I should say so!" exclaimed Short-Stop, in a subsequent conversation with Nettie Moore's mother, who had undergone a wholesome change of heart and feelings, and quite naturally, in view of the recent developments. "Of course, Mr. Montgomery Moore was the same man in general appearance that you had formerly known. But it was only through the reproduction of that appearance, and when he was not masquerading, by the simple absence of his shock-hair and beard, and with certain changes of voice and manner, as his *alter ego*, or other self, in the person of Mr. Montague Fullhand; with which transformation he doubtless, from what you tell me, likewise imposed more or less, and with equal success, upon your husband toward the last. That this double life should have been successfully practiced for so many years is certainly astounding; but is only another instance of the old saying, that truth is stranger than fiction. No wonder the newspapers are making it the sensation of the day."

"It still seems like a dream," remarked the widow. "I can't realize it yet."

"But now that the Zorilla Company has placed you in possession of your husband's money, together with all the wealth left behind in the Montgomery Moore and Montague Fullhand names, you ought to be content, even if in a waking dream. May I ask if the day for your daughter's marriage with Paul Eggleston has been fixed?"

"Yes; now that the base-balling tour has come to an end, I have consented that they shall be married the first of next month."

"Ah! the same day fixed for Chris Payne to lead Letitia Barfield to the altar?"

"Yes; Nettie has taken a great liking for Miss Barfield, as has Miss Eggleston also, and the weddings will perhaps be arranged to take place together."

"Humph! Then I suppose Miss Eggleston will appear in the character of a bridesmaid for one or another of the young ladies?"

Mrs. Moore smiled.

"Not if Mr. Barfield can have anything to say in the matter, I am inclined to imagine," she replied.

"What do you mean, ma'm, if you please?"

"Why, is it possible you haven't noticed it?"

"Noticed what?"

"How frantically in love with Drusilla Mr. Barfield is, to be sure. And only think of what a chance it is for her—with nothing but her restored little savings and her fanciful stage aspirations to her name—and he so rich, so handsome, so amiable, and with his high position in society! Ah, it will be no fault of Gideon Barfield if there is not a triple, rather than a double wedding, and with Drusilla Eggleston as the additional bride. Only to think of it!"

Falconbridge doubtless did think of it, and with a vengeance. At all events, he abruptly terminated the interview.

CHAPTER L.

LAST WORDS.

It was on the day following this conversation, and Falconbridge was still at the Harlem hotel, having just completed his good-byes with his late sporting associates, the majority of whom were preparing to depart for their homes, mostly in the interior of the State.

He was writing in his little private parlor which had been the common property of the visiting teams and their associates during their stay at the hotel, when the door opened and Florine entered.

She was just returned from an expedition down-town, and was looking buoyant and pleased.

"Congratulate me!" she cried.

He looked up with a laugh.

"For what? Are you going to be married, too?"

"Nonsense, no! But, thanks to your kindness and influence, I am a 'female inspector' in the New York Custom House, with congenial employment and an honorable career before me."

"Good! I do congratulate you on that, most heartily!"

"Of course you do, you dear, kind-hearted man! But, I am afraid I have bad news for you in return."

"I hardly think it."

"Mr. Barfield just drove up to the hotel door in a magnificent equipage."

"What of that?"

"He asked for Miss Eggleston, and is doubtless alone with her now in one of the large parlors below."

"But why should *this* interest me?" with an hercic attempt at indifference.

"Ten to one, then, he is proposing marriage to her!"

"Like enough!" with increasing success. "It is apparently in the air."

Florine looked at him with mingled exasperation and pity.

"As if *you* didn't care!"

"Care for what?"

"How innocent we are! For Mr. Barfield proposing marriage to Drusilla Eggleston, to be sure!"

"But, my dear woman, you are enigmatical! Why should I care, one way or the other, save to be glad of the young lady's good luck?"

"Oh, you! But it *would* be an enviable offer for any girl."

"Magnificent!"

"I—I am sadly afraid she will accept him."

"Afraid! You mean you hope she won't be such a goose as to refuse him."

"I mean nothing of the sort. Ha!" glancing out of the window, near which she had been standing. "Why, there he is getting into his carriage again!"

"Who?"

"Mr. Barfield. A brief enough interview, surely. And, somehow, he doesn't drive off with a very conquering air, either."

Here the door opened, and Miss Eggleston herself entered.

She was looking a little pale, but otherwise her own beautiful, collected self.

"Mr. Barfield has proposed—I *know* he has!" cried Florine, laughing. "We are intimate friends, the three of us together here—confess it, Drusilla."

"Yes, then," replied Drusilla, after a moment's hesitation. "There was no request on Mr. Barfield's part, that his offer should be kept secret."

Florine clapped her hands, though with premature disappointment at heart.

"When is it to be?" she cried.

"What do you mean?"

"The wedding! Of course you accepted him?"

"Just the contrary."

"Do you mean to tell me that you refused him?"

"Certainly."

"Why, the man is rich, splendid, unobjectionable—a marvelous catch!"

"All that you say, I have no doubt. But it happened that I did not love him."

"Oh, how really glad I am!"

And Florine embraced her friend, with enthusiasm.

"I shall be an actress," added Drusilla, composedly. "Henceforth, unless my heart should become truly engaged, I propose to live for Art alone. Will you not support me in that sentiment, Florine?"

"Until your heart is won by the right man—yes, my dear."

"And you, Mr. Falconbridge?" with an arch look at the detective.

"With all my heart!" exclaimed the latter, rising abruptly, and pressing her outstretched hand warmly.

He looked as if he might say something more, but he did not then and there.

There may, indeed, be another story, chiefly concerned with Old Falcon's wooing o't; but, together with his career as the Diamond-Field Detective, our present narrative is ended.

THE END.

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